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# THE BOY CAVALIERS;

OR,

## *THE SIEGE OF CLIDESFORD.*

BY

THE REV. H. C. ADAMS, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "BARFORD BRIDGE," "SCHOOLBOY HONOUR," ETC.



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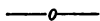
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# *THE BOY CAVALIERS.*



## CHAPTER I.

### THE LYDFORDS.



LYDCOTT MANOR, in the reign of Charles I., was situated in one of the lovely spots for which the western shires of England are so celebrated. A long sloping tract of country, originally clothed with wood, had been cleared, many generations previously, for a space of some four or five hundred acres, and laid out in meadows and corn-fields, together with pear and apple orchards, clustering round the Manor-house. The latter, which stood as nearly as possible in the very centre of the domain, was a picturesque structure, the style and date of which it would have puzzled any antiquary to determine. It was built partly of timber, with rough plaster and rubble filling up the interstices ;

partly of undressed stones, rudely cemented together. The window-frames were constructed of oak, and so plainly of later date than the walls, that they afforded no clue to the age of the building; and yet even they seemed so ancient, that two or three centuries must have elapsed since their insertion. Inside, the staircases and passages bewildered the visitor by their intricacy and want of order. The chambers were for the most part wide and low; though some one or two were considerably higher than is ordinarily the case, even in manor-houses of the present day. The furniture, massive and solid, suited well with the general character, not only of the building, but of the inhabitants, who belonged to the class corresponding to the gentlemen farmers of the present time—sturdy descendants of the franklins of Alfred's days, who had retained their lands, their language, and their manners, as little influenced by the Norman Seignorie around them as if the latter had never crossed the Channel between Normandy and Hastings. The most casual observer could not fail to be struck with the clean and orderly condition of the farm-lands, which lay beyond the garden and its shrubberies, for half a mile or so on every side. The trim hedges; the sound condition of the gates and fences; the heavy crops, the last

sheaves of which, at the commencement of this tale, were being carried into a well-stored rick-yard—all bore witness to the fact, well-known throughout the country side, that if Master Lydford could not match his neighbour, Sir William Warington, in extent of acreage, he knew how to extract more profit from a single acre than his more aristocratic compeer could from three.

The entire domain formed a little oasis in the midst of the forest, which stretched for many a mile in a westerly direction, until the eye was arrested at its furthest verge by the undulating outline of the Malvern Hills. Here and there tall chimneys or a tapering spire peeped out from the surrounding foliage, marking the place where stood the residence of some ancient family; or a rustic church, forming the centre of a village, snugly hidden—as English villages of old were wont to hide themselves, but as they will never hide themselves again—in the heart of the merry greenwood.

One of the largest of the mansions—a castle we ought more properly to term it, as in fact it was generally termed by the surrounding peasantry—belonged to the baronet whose name we have already mentioned, a cavalier of ancient family, and of large, though embarrassed, fortune. &

stood at the distance of scarcely half a mile from the Manor-house, and a large portion of the frontage might be seen through the trees, which grew more sparsely in its immediate neighbourhood. It presented a grotesque mixture of styles, some parts being evidently of great antiquity, and others of modern addition; though recently the whole had been strengthened and repaired, the ancient moat dug out and deepened, and a crenellated wall built round its inner edge. These were evidences to an observant eye that the owner of Clidesford Castle was one who took active part in the stormy incidents of those times. In truth, he had more than once, previously to the final defeat of Charles, attracted the notice of the Parliamentary generals; and a force, on one occasion, had actually been detached by Fairfax, with orders to require the surrender of the castle, or lay it in ruins. But scarcely had the siege been commenced in earnest, than the unexpected news of the action at Roundwaydown caused the sudden departure of the besieging force; to the great delight of old Lydford, who, with such of his men as he could muster to the aid of his friend and neighbour, had borne his part in the short but sharp encounter with infinite satisfaction to himself, no less than to his allies.

In fact, in his whole court and army, the unfortunate king could not boast a more sincere and zealous adherent than Miles Lydford. Like his ancestors before him, and we may add, his descendants to the present time, he possessed but few ideas; but to those he clung with a dogged determination which it would be difficult indeed to overcome or change. One of these was the traditionary faith that, in all differences between the sovereign and the people, the cause of the former was to be espoused—a very simple, but at all events an intelligible, principle; and which, as Sir William remarked, when his neighbour quoted it to him, saved an enormity of trouble. Old Miles would often edify his children with narratives—how one of his ancestors had died on the field of Evesham by the side of Edward I., in the celebrated charge which broke the ranks of Simon de Montfort; how they had always remained faithful throughout the wars of the Roses, to the House of York, to which they had considered the hereditary right of succession to belong; and how his great-grandfather had stood by Richard Crookback to the last; never consenting to acknowledge Henry VII. as his king, until his marriage with Elizabeth of York gave him a legitimate right to the crown. Such being the old

Cavalier's political creed, it was small wonder that when Charles I. raised the royal standard at Nottingham, Miles Lydford was one of the first to obey the summons, with as many of his friends and neighbours as he could persuade to accompany him. He saw the fields of Edgehill, Newbury, and Naseby; nor was it until the last military force that had supported Charles laid down its arms, that he returned once more to the quiet shades of Clidesford.

It was considered somewhat singular by the good people of the neighbourhood, that the Lydfords should have escaped unhurt from the penalties which fell so heavily on such of their neighbours, high and low, as had espoused the same party as themselves. While Sir William Warrington had to pay a fine to the new government, which left him little remaining, beyond the bare walls of his house, and the acres of his estate; while his next neighbour, Pierce Heyford, was not only dispossessed of every yard of land which he had owned, but further—hanged as a traitor,—old Miles was visited with no severer punishment than a reprimand from the chief of the commissioners sent by the Parliament to deal with the Malignants, together with an admonition not to offend again. This good fortune he owed to an accidental

circumstance which had occurred several years previously. It had chanced not long before the struggle at Newbury, that Lydford, who had returned to raise more recruits for the king's service, encountered, within a few hundred yards of his own door, a small party of Parliamentary soldiers. A stout combat had ensued, till the Roundheads, outnumbered, at length took to flight or were slain; with the exception of one youth, who continued to defend himself with determined resolution, and was at last severely wounded, and made prisoner. Admiring the courage of his captive, Lydford had him conveyed to his own house, where he was carefully nursed by his wife and daughter. Hubert Walters, for such the name of the wounded man proved to be, recovered after a month or two, and was permitted to depart. His sojourn among the Royalists had little effect on his political principles, but a very grave one, nevertheless, on his after-career.

Cicely Lydford, although at that time scarce fifteen years of age, was already the talk of the neighbourhood for her singular beauty and grace. Walters, who, during the long period of illness and tardy recovery, had little to engage his thoughts was deeply influenced by her attractions; and nothing, perhaps, but the certainty that old



Lydford would not only have declined his suit with scorn, but probably forthwith have ejected him from his house, prevented him from asking her hand, even then, in marriage. But he did all in his power to secure the damsel's favour. At the battle of Naseby he had attracted Cromwell's attention and was employed by him in the intrigues which followed—growing more and more in that general's favour, as his rare abilities for action displayed themselves more clearly. He was in truth just such a character as in lawless, turbulent times rises at once to a distinction, which, under ordinary circumstances, it would be scarcely possible for him to attain. He was deep and subtle, but rapid withal and daring, when the occasion required. He had deep and strong passions, kept in check by a clear head and a resolute will, but by no restraint of conscience. He never forgot his purpose, or faltered in it, or spared those who might interfere with its accomplishment. The first effort which he made to obtain the goodwill of Cicely was by the very obvious expedient of affording protection to her father. It was through his representations that the old Cavalier was treated with such unwonted lenity by the Parliamentary Commission—a fact which he took care to have fully made known to Cicely and her father.

But it was hard to say to which of the two his suit was the more unwelcome. Young as the girl was, she had imbibed all the hereditary prejudices of her family and party, and these more than counterbalanced whatever favour Walters's handsome person, and ascendancy of character, might at first have obtained for him. As for the old Cavalier, it was enough for him, as he declared, that Walters was a bitter Puritan, an alien from his Church, and a traitor to his king. He would as lief that his blood should mingle with that of Noll Cromwell, or of Beelzebub himself (if he had any), as with that of young Hubert. A very curt and guarded letter of thanks was sent to the latter, in reply to that in which he had announced the service he had been enabled to do the family. When, some time afterwards, Walters sought to improve his presumed advantage, by a personal visit to Lydford's house, he was civilly received, but found that his courtship did not prosper. Cicely, who was now a girl of seventeen, and unusually shrewd for her years, was too wary to provoke the open enmity of her admirer, which she was aware might be fatal to them all. But she contrived with womanly cleverness to avoid the subject on which the other was anxious to press her; until at last the lover was compelled to depart, more enamoured than ever,

but still uncertain as to the final issue of his suit. A variety of causes had combined to prevent his frequently journeying into Worcestershire during the next two or three years, and Cicely was successful in avoiding an open quarrel on the occasion of the few visits he was enabled to make ; though the tone of her lover became gradually remonstrant, and at last menacing, as the hope of success grew ever more doubtful.

At length it seemed as though he had resolved to take steps which might extort by necessity what he could not obtain by persuasion. Lydford was accused to the government as a Malignant, to whom an undue amount of leniency had been shown ; but who had continued, nevertheless, to plot for the overthrow of his benefactors. Orders were sent to arrest and lodge him in Worcester gaol. But Hubert Walters himself was in attendance upon Cromwell in Scotland, whence he could not be spared ; and he was therefore obliged to intrust with the execution of the warrant, one of his followers, a certain Job Peterson—a rigid Puritan, but withal a man unscrupulous and cunning in pursuit of his own private advantage. The latter undertook the commission *con amore*, and Mil would have fallen into his clutches, had it not been for two lads, his son and nephew, who, by a dari-

and successful stratagem, contrived to defeat his purpose.

Hugh Lydford at this time had just reached his sixteenth year, a generous, honest lad, somewhat hasty of temper, and given to mischief; as English lads of his age have ever been from time immemorial. Cuthbert Lang, his cousin, was his junior only by a few weeks. His proper home was at Upton-on-Severn; but he passed more than half his time during the summer months at Lydcott Manor; he and his cousin being inseparable companions. The boys much resembled each other in character—the main difference being that Cuthbert possessed a keener wit, and a more equable temper.

It happened that the cousins, one fine day early in spring, had followed Sir William's staghounds on their rough forest ponies, as long as they could keep within sight or hearing of the sport, and late in the afternoon found themselves on the skirts of the forest, at a distance of some dozen miles from Lydcott Manor, and near an inn called the "Clidesford Arms." Dismounting to give their tired ponies some rest, they seated themselves on the ale-bench under the boughs of the goodly elm whence hung Master Hatch's signboard. Almost immediately afterwards a small party of horsemen

rode up, tired apparently with a long and dusty journey. Drawing rein, they too alighted, and, dismissing their steeds to the stables, called for refreshment. They took small notice of the two lads, who indeed were almost concealed from them by the huge bole of the tree ; but commenced a conversation among themselves, which soon attracted the attention of their hearers.

"Are there none of ye that know these parts?" said a tall man, dressed in sad-coloured garments, with more than the usual allowance of steeple-crowned hat. "I should deem the place could scarce be many miles distant."

"I know it, Master Job, but not well," said another, a man of huge frame and stature. "Yonder road leads, as I deem, direct to Worcester ; and this Clidesford lies a mile or two off the main road to the left. But I am told there is but a bridle-path through the woods thither, unless we proceed the whole distance to Worcester, and then journey to Clidesford by another road. I have seldom been at Clidesford myself ; nor do I know in what part of the village Lydcott Manor is to be found."

"There will be but little difficulty in ascertaining that, Saunders," said a third whose left cheek was disfigured by a sword-cut. "If we once reach

Clidesford itself, every peasant will know the house of Miles Lydford. I myself know his person right well."

"True, Oliver Freeborn," replied the first speaker. "But they may suspect our errand, and direct us amiss. We might chance to light upon one of Lydford's farming men, or at least some friend or neighbour. Of a verity, it were better to procure a guide here, of whose fidelity we may make sure."

"Fear not, Master Peterson," said the other. "He cannot escape us—at all events, not for long. Come, Hinchcliffe, Rumbold, Saunders, another cup of ale round, and then we remount our horses."

Meanwhile Hugh and Cuthbert had slipped away, greatly alarmed at the conversation they had overheard. Young as they were, they yet fully understood the danger which threatened the old man, if he should fall into the hands of his pursuers.

"What is to be done, Cuthbert?" exclaimed Hugh. "These men have evidently been sent to seize my father—doubtless on some charge devised by Hubert Walters. Once in prison, he will have little chance of obtaining mercy or justice either."

"You must mount your pony, and ride with

what speed you can, to warn him," said Cuthbert. "If you start at once, you will be at Lydcott in two hours or so."

"Yes," returned Hugh; "I can do that, of course; but these men will procure a guide here, who knows the forest paths as well as I do; and they will arrive as soon, or it may be sooner, than myself. Besides, grant that I reach the Manor an hour before them, that time might suffice for the safety of my father, but not for that of my mother and Cicely, to say nought of the farm-stock and cattle."

"Heed not that, but be off at once," said Cuthbert. "I will take care that they are guided aright. Nay, for the matter of that, I will even guide them myself."

"You?" exclaimed Hugh hastily, and instinctively clutching the handle of his wood-knife, as he spoke. "You, Cuthbert, guide these traitors to arrest my father?"

"Ay, even I," replied Cuthbert, laughing. "I know the forest-paths as well as any one, do I not—especially that one that leads through the morass near Deep Dale Bottom?"

"Deep Dale Bottom!" cried Hugh. "Why that lies two miles to the right of the path at the least! Ha, I conceive you," he added, echoing

his companion's laugh, a moment afterwards. "I will be off this moment, and leave you to manage this. Your wit is ever keener than mine."

So saying, he proceeded straight to the stable, and mounting his forest pony, which had now recovered its freshness, set forward at the full speed of the animal on his way home.

Meanwhile Cuthbert, divesting himself of his socks and shoes, and substituting for his own a coarse cap and jerkin, which he borrowed from the tapster, approached the group of horsemen, who were now on the point of resuming their journey, with a humble entreaty that they would permit him to travel in their company as far as Clidesford; whither, as he had heard, they were proceeding.

"I must reach the village before sundown," he said, "or my master will beat me sore. I have lost much time, and my pony has lamed itself so badly, that it cannot move even at a foot's pace. Let me ride on the crupper of one of your horses, or I shall never get there to-night."

"Clidesford!" said Peterson, reigning in his steed, which he had just mounted. "Of a verity, we were even now about to inquire for a guide thither. Are you sure you know the way?"

"Know it!" answered the other with a laugh.



"I may well know what I have travelled some scores of times, and that within the last twelve-month. But take me up on your saddle, master, or we may not arrive at Clidesford before night-fall. It is but the spring of the year, and the dusk comes on early in the forest. Trust me, I will take all care for your safety."

After another moment's hesitation, the Puritan complied ; and the party, setting out under Cuthbert's guidance, trotted briskly along the high-road for a quarter of a mile, thence diverging into a narrow path, which led into the depths of the wood. Proceeding now at a more leisurely pace, they continued their course for upwards of a mile, when Cuthbert called to them to slacken speed—an injunction which he repeated half an hour afterwards, with the additional caution, "that they had better move forward in single file, and at a foot's pace, as the ground on either side of the path was somewhat swampy."

"Somewhat swampy, callest thou it!" exclaimed one of the soldiers, whom Peterson had addressed as Oliver Freeborn. "It is as ugly a bog as I ever saw in Lincolnshire, and has been so for this quarter of a mile past. 'Ware comrade!" he shouted, as the horse immediately before him, shying slightly to one side of the track, plunged over its fetlocks

in the soft earth, and was with difficulty extricated. "Hark you, youngster, is there much more of this kind of travelling? I misdoubt you have missed your way, or intend some treachery."

"Nay, it will soon change," said Cuthbert, "but the track seems to have been interrupted by yonder fallen tree. I will dismount, and lead the way on foot, that I may guide you the more surely."

They had now advanced some distance through a waste spot, which stretched for several hundred yards in the middle of the forest. It was covered with coarse reed and soft mossy grass, through which it was impossible to trace any path, or even discern the track of their own footsteps. The twilight was beginning to come on, and the danger of their situation became every moment more evident. Still Cuthbert moved on with confidence, and the others followed him, though with increasing distrust.

"The imp means mischief," said Freeborn, addressing Peterson, in a low tone, and unslinging the carbine which hung at his saddle-bow. "I have half a mind to repay his services with an ounce of lead."

"Do not do so," said Peterson. "Of a verity, I mistrust the lad myself, and will keep a wary eye

upon him. But if we lose his guidance now, we shall be in all likelihood lost in the bog, or at best benighted in the forest. And see, we have almost crossed the dangerous ground. That long log seems to be the end of the morass."

As he spoke, they approached the fallen tree, a long slender trunk which had been stripped of its branches, and had lain apparently in its present position for a long time past. Springing lightly up, Cuthbert ran along it till he reached the further end, and then ensconcing himself behind a huge oak, opened a parley with his late companions.

"What ho, Master Peterson!" he shouted, "I must wish you good even. I promised to care for your safety, and therefore advise you by no means to venture further. Of a verity, this is the worst part of the whole bog, and would swallow up horse and man as easily as a high sea would swallow up one of Master Waldron's leaky galliots. Do not venture on the poplar trunk there," he added, observing that one of the party had alighted, apparently for that purpose. "It will not bear your weight, I promise you. I felt it quiver and crack even as I ran across it."

"We will see that, thou varlet," said Peterson, incredulously. "Comrades, mark yonder limb of mischief with your muskets, and shoot him dead

the moment he emerges from his cover." Throwing off his heavy boots, he advanced cautiously along the fallen tree, but had scarce gone half-way when it bent under him, and if he had not drawn instantly back, he would have been plunged in the bog. As it was, it was only by the help of his companions that he was able to regain *terra firma*; and a few minutes afterwards a distant shout of triumph warned them that Cuthbert had stolen away and escaped in the confusion.

Late the next day the party arrived at Lydcott, in dismal plight, having been constrained to pass the whole night, and the greater part of the morning, in vain efforts to escape from the morass, whence they would in all likelihood never have emerged at all, but for the aid of a wood-cutter whom they chanced to encounter.

It needs not to add that Miles Lydford and his family, together with all the more valuable parts of his goods and possessions, had disappeared many hours before their arrival.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE ENCOUNTER IN THE LANE.



REAT was the wrath of Peterson when he discovered that the prey had escaped his clutches. He would have revenged himself by burning Miles Lydford's house and plundering his goods, had it not been for the strict injunctions which had been laid upon him, to commit no violence beyond that of seizing on Lydford's person. He knew Hubert Walters too well to venture on transgressing his orders. All he could do was to quarter himself and his followers at Lydcott Manor, and despatch parties in every direction in quest of the fugitive, offering at the same time a handsome reward for his apprehension. For a long time, nothing at all could be learned respecting the place of Lydford's concealment: and though information was conveyed to Peterson that Cicely and her mother, together with the two boys, had been sheltered by Sir William Warrington at Clidesford Castle, ye' this proved of little service to him. If he cou'

have got them into his own hands, he might no doubt have contrived, by dint of importunity or threats, to obtain a clue to the Cavalier's hiding-place; or, failing this, he might have subjected the boys, at least, to a sharp cross-examination, together with some of the stimulants, by the help of which it was customary to extract information in those days. In particular, he might have put Master Cuthbert's mischievous fingers into the gauntlets, or hung him up by the heels till he gave the required answers; and Master Job's spirit yearned within him to be engaged in a task so congenial to his inclinations. But he had no warrant for their arrest, and Sir William Warrington's house was not altogether a safe place in which to try such experiments, unless backed by the authority of the law. It was more than probable, he felt, that the stout knight would have pitched him and his followers into the castle moat, or possibly have shortened the whole party of their ears, if they had ventured on any act of violent intrusion within his domains. He was fain, therefore, to employ milder means; and, as week after week passed by, and no progress was made towards the attainment of his object, his uneasiness became serious alarm. Peterson, as has already been intimated, stood in great dread of his principal's

anger—so great, indeed, as to cause much surprise among his companions, who knew the lawless and unscrupulous character of the man, and were not acquainted with some facts of his private history which placed him completely in the power of Walters. The latter, fortunately for Job, and probably for Lydford also, was still detained in the North by Cromwell; who was waiting on the movements of the Scotch army, much as a cat watches a mouse, through its half-shut eyes—appearing to the bystanders to be asleep, but, in reality, only abiding the time when the prey will venture within reach, to spring up and devour it.

At length two rumours reached the Puritan simultaneously, neither of which afforded him much satisfaction. The first of these was, that the young King of Scots had made a sudden irruption into England, and was moving southwards, at the distance of only a few days' march from Worcester; the other, that Miles Lydford had left his hiding-place and ridden forth to join him. Following almost immediately on these tidings came a third piece of information, still more unwelcome, which was that Sir William Warrington had been employed for some time past in secretly distributing arms among his tenantry,

and was now on the point of taking the field, at the head of a considerable force. No sooner had this last report been confirmed, than Master Job forthwith mounted his steed, ordering his men to follow him with all convenient speed, and proceeded northwards to make the best report possible, under the circumstances, to Hubert Walters. A few days after his departure, the Cavaliers entered Worcester; and Dame Lydford and Cicely resumed possession of their old abode, where they had continued unmolested until the time at which the story commences.

It was late in the afternoon of the 3rd of September, and the last sheaves of the harvest were being carried from Miles Lydford's fields into the well-stored rick-yard, when Cicely Lydford took an opportunity of slipping away from the throng, and made her way towards a narrow lane skirting the wood at the lower end of the farm. Very lovely did she look in her kirtle and hat, a slight flush colouring her cheek, from which a spectator might perhaps have guessed that she was on her way to keep tryst with some favoured lover beneath the shelter of the greenwood. The flush, however, was due to no such cause as this, but to anxiety on her father's account, who had been for some time past with King Charles's army at



Worcester. Reports most unfavourable to the Royal cause were in daily circulation. It was said that Cromwell had now come up, with an army of 30,000 men, and was on the point of attacking the town, which could offer no effectual resistance. The Cavaliers, it was further affirmed, were disheartened and at variance amongst themselves—the English leaders being jealous that the chief command should have been entrusted to a Scotchman. These reports growing, as they did every day, more alarming, so terrified Dame Lydford, that Cicely had induced one of the farm-servants, by the offer of a large bribe, to carry to the camp at Worcester a note, in which she entreated her father to write her a few lines, calculated to reassure her mother's mind and her own respecting the rumours which were abroad. The mission was one of considerable danger, and Giles Rossiter, when he undertook it, had especially stipulated that it should be kept secret from his fellow-servants at the farm. It had been further agreed that she should meet him two hours before sunset, at the corner of the hazel copse in the lane, to receive any answer with which he might be furnished. On reaching the spot in question, she found that the messenger had not yet returned and she seated herself on the bank to await hi

arrival. She was soon absorbed by her melancholy reflections. Enthusiastic Royalist as she was, she could not disguise from herself that the king's cause was on the decline, and if he should be defeated at Worcester, would be hopelessly lost. What would be the fate of her father—nay, of her mother and brother, should this prove to be the case, as appeared but too likely? It could hardly be hoped that they would again escape the consequences of having provoked the wrath of the victorious party—consequences which had fallen so heavily on their friends and neighbours, and had only been averted from themselves by special good fortune. Would Hubert Walters's influence prove sufficient to save them a second time? Was it possible that he would exert it, even if it were so? And what would be the price he would exact in return, if he were minded to protect them? Cicely's cheek grew pale as this thought occurred to her, and she was glad when Hugh and Cuthbert, who had missed her from the harvest-field and gone in search of her, came running up with a message from Dame Lydford, requiring her immediate presence at the supper.

"Nay, I cannot, Hugh," said Cicely, when this summons had been delivered to her. "I am expecting Giles Rossiter every minute with a letter

from our father, and if I leave this spot I shall certainly miss him."

"Giles Rossiter?" said Hugh. "I saw him set out this morning at daybreak, though I knew not then on what errand he was bent. He ought to have returned long ere this."

"I appointed him to meet me at this place and hour," said Cicely; "that is, near about this time, for I think it can scarce want two hours to sunset. He cannot be long in coming now."

"True," said Hugh; "that is supposing he returns at all, and has not been made prisoner on the way. But, Cicely, you must not delay. Our mother is ill at ease, and can scarce bring herself to take her place at the head of the board. She needs your help and countenance, and you must not fail her. We will await your messenger here, and report to you, without loss of time, whatever tidings he may bring."

"Let us climb the Prior's Oak, and see if Rossiter is anywhere near at hand," said Cuthbert, goodnaturedly, as he noticed the reluctance expressed in Cicely's face, though she offered no objection to the proposal. "It is not a quarter of a mile distant, and commands the road to Worcester for two miles and more. If he is not in sight, there will be time for Cicely to go up to the

feast and return before his arrival. Let us go at once. We shall not be ten minutes absent."

"Well thought of," said Hugh, and the two boys ran off at once, leaving Cicely once more to her sad thoughts.

In a few minutes she was again startled from her reverie—not this time by the mirth of her brother and cousin, but by the noise of horses' feet close beside her. Before she had time to escape from the spot, a small troop of cavalry, belonging, as she perceived at a glance, to Cromwell's well-known regiment of Ironsides, came up at full speed. She was in hopes that they would pass her without notice; but the officer in command had no sooner caught sight of her figure, than he reined in his horse, shouting to his men to ride on towards Worcester, and he would overtake them in a few minutes. Meanwhile he threw himself from the saddle, and, leading the horse by the rein, advanced to Cicely's side.

"Good morrow, fair Mistress Cicely," he said, in a tone which he strove hard to render courtly and tender, but which, to her ear, was but too plainly assumed to hide a different feeling. "Good morrow, and well met."

"Good morrow, Master Walters," replied Cicely, struggling with her embarrassment. "I scarce

knew you in your new uniform and appointments. It is long, methinks, since we met."

"True. Yet I remember our last meeting well. It was on this very spot, if I mistake not. Was it not so?"

"It may have been," replied the maiden; "but I can scarce speak with certainty."

"But, at least, you will remember the question which I urged you in vain to answer, though you promised to reply when we should next meet. You must remember that, Cicely, whatever else you may have forgotten."

"It is so long ago," faltered Cicely, shrinking and colouring under the ardent glance which he fixed upon her. "And many things have occurred of late to trouble me! And—and—surely the present time is unsuited. You are on some errand requiring haste, it would seem. Some other time——"

"No, lady," rejoined the Puritan, in a different tone from that which he had hitherto employed. "Your promise was to answer my question, ay or no, when next we met; and I claim the performance of that promise now. I have too long been dallied with, and will not further brook your trifling. Hark you, fair mistress. It is well you should know what is the true aspect of affairs in

yonder city,"—he pointed towards Worcester as he spoke. "The Malignants assembled there, with the raw boy whom they would fain make a king, have no sufficient force to resist our numbers, even if they were not divided amongst themselves. General Cromwell is even now on the point of attacking them, if he has not already done so. They will fly before him——"

"I do not believe it," exclaimed his auditor, indignantly. "They may be overpowered by superior numbers; but who ever saw the Cavaliers, on a fair field, fly before their opponents?"

"I have seen it, maiden, many a time," returned Walters. "But we waste time. They will fly before General Cromwell, as surely as the deer before the hunter; and the life of every man bearing arms among them who escapes the battle, will be at his mercy. I have twice interfered to save your father's life and liberty——"

"Oh, and you will do so again," exclaimed Cicely, forgetting all other considerations in the agony of her apprehension, "you will do so again, Master Walters, and I will bless and—and thank you."

"Ay, maiden, but will you love me? will you be my bride? I have already said I will be fooled no longer. Unite your lot with mine, and from

that moment you and yours are safe. I have interest with the Lord-General, as all men know ; and he is all-powerful in England now, though, it may be, men have not openly allowed the fact. You and your family are safe if you wed with me ; but, mark you, only on that condition. Refuse, and I will leave your father to his fate. Nay, you not only pronounce his doom, but consign your mother and all your kindred to ruin. Now, your answer, and quickly, for I cannot linger here."

"Give me time," sobbed the unhappy girl, distracted between her anxiety for her father, and her dislike of the man before her. "Ask me to-morrow. I cannot answer now."

"To-morrow may be, will be, too late. I tell you, as surely as yonder sun is in the heavens, before it sets Miles Lydford will be a prisoner, or a fugitive, if he survives the battle. In truth, if I am to save him at all, I must be gone at once. Come with me then, Cicely : this very evening you shall become mine ; and then, dearest, all will be well."

He laid his hand upon her arm as he spoke, endeavouring with gentle violence to draw her towards him ; but his touch seemed to dissolve the spell by which she had hitherto been bound. She broke from him, and screamed aloud for help

her shrieks growing more piercing, as he persisted in his attempts to soothe her. At length his patience was exhausted.

"We must cut this short," he muttered to himself. "She will never wed me with her own good will, that is certain. But it is one thing to wring a consent from her here, and another in Worcester city. She will be alone, among strangers and enemies—I must be a blunderer, indeed, if I fail there!"

He clasped his arms round her, as the thought passed through his mind, and raising her from the ground, endeavoured to place her on the saddle of his steed. Cicely broke from him once more, but her struggles grew fainter, and she felt that her senses were leaving her. In another moment she would have been carried off. But at this juncture, Hugh came running up, attracted by her cries, and drawing the sword, with which all men in those days were armed, interposed himself between Walters and her.

Hugh was, as the reader has already been told, sixteen years of age, and unusually tall and strong. He had also, young as he was, a very fair knowledge of his weapon, it having been a favourite employment with old Lydford to give him and Cuthbert instructions in its use. But he was of



course no match for the well-armed and experienced Parliamentary officer. Nor did the latter condescend to recognize him as an antagonist.

"Stand out of the way, boy!" he exclaimed contemptuously; "and do not meddle with the affairs of men. I arrest this lady on a charge of treason, and have warrant for what I do. Interrupt me not, or you may force me to punish your presumption."

"You are a traitor yourself," returned Hugh, furiously, "and know well that Cicely is none. This is but a pretext to mask your own villany. You shall not carry her off while I can defend her."

Walters saw that he must take immediate measures, if he meant to secure his victim. Some of the farm-servants might be near at hand—in any case longer delay would be impossible. He drew his sword, and crossed it with that of his opponent. The first half-dozen passes showed him that the latter, though a better fencer than he had expected, was far his inferior in strength and skill; and he would have little difficulty in disarming him. The opportunity he expected soon presented itself. Hugh's foot tripped against a stone, as he parried one of his antagonist's

thrusts ; he fell forward on his knee, and the next moment his sword flew from his grasp. Striding over him, and presenting his sword at his throat, Walters was on the point of demanding his unconditional submission on pain of instant death, when a blow from a heavy stone struck him full on the head, causing him, notwithstanding the protection of his steel cap, to reel from one side of the pathway to the other. A minute or two passed before he had recovered himself sufficiently to understand what had happened ; and he then perceived that Hugh had resumed his sword, and was again advancing to meet him ; while close at his side, another lad of the same age, in whom he recognized Cuthbert Lang, was bending over Cicely Lydford, and endeavouring to raise her from the ground. He was at no loss to understand by whose hand the stone had been flung. Inwardly registering a vow of vengeance against the youth who had now a second time defeated his designs, he again attacked Hugh, intending to disable or kill him before his cousin could come to the rescue. Hugh stood stoutly on his defence, parrying his adversary's lightning-like thrusts with all the skill he could command. But the combat was too unequal to be long maintained, and a minute or two more must have witnessed his discomfiture,

if the attention of all parties at this moment had not been attracted by shouts at a short distance, accompanied by pistol-shots and the clash of swords. Almost instantly afterwards, a dozen or so of Walters's troopers came at a headlong gallop along the lane, closely pursued by three times their number of Royalists—the latter headed by a Cavalier of middle age, whom all recognized as Sir William Warrington. The peril was imminent, but Walters extricated himself with the ready daring of his character. Leaping on his charger's back, and striking right and left with the drawn sword which he still retained, he broke clear of the Royalists, who would have seized his bridle, and dashed at full speed after his own troopers. Then grasping the petronel which hung at his saddle-bow, he turned half round and took steady aim at the horse of the foremost of his pursuers. The fall of the animal and its rider checked the pursuit for a moment; and the Cavalier took advantage of the delay thus occasioned to put a stop to it altogether.

"The rascals have escaped," he said; "that is to say, a third or so of their number have escaped—for the rest, I wot, have been handsomely disposed of. Alack, and it is a pity, too; for my fingers itch to repay some more of the hard knocks

whereof their comrades have been so liberal to-day. But we cannot spare the time for pursuit. Move on, Percy, with all speed to the castle, and see that the sentries are placed, and the gates secured. But whom have we here?" he added, a moment afterwards, as his eye lighted on Cicely, who had now recovered her consciousness. "The lovely Mistress Cicely, I make mine avow! Fair damsel, I know not what may have brought you hither into the midst of this affray; but you will do best to accompany us straightway to the castle. Before night the village will be filled with a Roundhead scum which will render to beauty and condition but little of the respect they merit. Here, some one—thou, long John Rufford—alight, and give Mistress Cicely your horse; or, rather, take her on the saddle before you, for we have not a minute to lose."

"Care not for me, Sir William," exclaimed the young lady; "but tell me, I pray you, if you know aught of my father."

"Your father?" replied the knight. "'Odds heart! I—I have not seen him since an hour past noon, when he rode forth with his troop to repel an attempt of the rebels to cross the Team. I doubt not he is stout and well. Report said that Montgomery and his Scots had driven Fleetwood

back—better luck than ours, as you see. Nay, cheer up, fair lady ; be sure my worthy neighbour is safe, and has made his escape into Wales, where His Majesty has many friends.”

While he ran on thus, the greater part of his followers had moved off, under the leadership of Captain Percy, in the direction of the castle ; John Rufford and Cicely along with them. Sir William still lingered.

“We have secured the young lady’s safety, Langley,” he said, addressing a young officer who rode at his side ; “but Dame Lydford and the others should be warned at once, or their retreat will be cut off. Ha ! and there stands my friend Hugh—the very person to bear the message. Hark ye, lad ! a word with you.”

He bent forward, and spoke a few minutes apart with Hugh ; then, putting spurs to his charger, he rode sharply away, followed by Langley and the rest of the soldiers.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE HUT IN THE FOREST.



THE two lads were left behind in the lane, too much absorbed, as it appeared, by the recollection of the exciting scene which they had just witnessed to turn their thoughts to any other subject. But after the lapse of a minute or two, Cuthbert broke the silence.

"It is time that we bestir ourselves," he said, "unless we would have the Roundheads upon us. In truth, I marvel they have not shown themselves ere this. What ails you, Hugh?" he added, observing the expression of his cousin's face.

"I was thinking of my father," answered Hugh.

"My uncle? What of him? You heard what Sir William said, did you not?"

"That did I," replied Hugh, "and I would I had heard nought else. He spoke cheerily to Cicely, being afraid, as I guess, of alarming her. But he told me a very different tale. He said that Roger Bence had seen my father cut down by one of

Fleetwood's troopers, and that he was sore wounded, though, he thought, not killed. His hurts would require speedy attendance, which he is scarce likely to receive. Nay, even if he should have been carried into Worcester, to have his wounds cared for, he must be Cromwell's prisoner, and that, to my thinking, were wellnigh as bad as death itself."

"True," said Cuthbert. "Unless rumour altogether belies him, Oliver's treatment of the prisoners whom he captured at Dunbar, is a scandal to a Christian land. Nearly half of them have died of pestilence, brought on, as it is generally believed, by want of sufficient food; and the rest have been sold as slaves to the Turks. My uncle is right; there is no tyrant after all like an upstart!"

"True," said Hugh, "but that only renders what I said just now the more urgent. We must not suffer my father to fall into the hands of his enemies, if it can be helped. If you and I, Cuthbert, set off without delay, we may reach the banks of the Team before nightfall, and he may be conveyed in safety from the field."

"But my aunt?" said Cuthbert. "Who is to care for her safety?"

"We must send a message, if possible," replied Hugh. "To go up to the house ourselves would lose us half an hour. Ha! and here comes Giles

Rossiter just in the nick of time. Doubtless he has been delayed on his journey by the runaways from the field. Perhaps he may bring us some tidings from our father."

As he spoke, Rossiter joined them ; but he had no other information to impart than that he had found, on approaching Worcester, that the action had commenced, the issue of which was already known to them. He readily undertook the commission with which Hugh entrusted him ; and then the two lads, having provided themselves with two petronels which the Roundheads had dropped in their flight, set forward on their journey.

They soon discovered that they had undertaken no easy task. Notwithstanding their anxiety, they found it impossible to press forward with any speed. Every moment groups of armed men passed them—some, fugitives from the field, hurrying along with dismay depicted in their countenances, and seeing an enemy in every stranger they encountered ; others more cool and collected, but holding their weapons in readiness to strike, if the slightest obstacle should be offered to their escape. Anon a company of Parliamentary troopers would gallop up and demand information respecting some Royalist of whom they were in pursuit—half inclined to regard all as Malignants



who did not supply them with the intelligence they desired. On one of these occasions the officer in command was so far provoked by Cuthbert's denial that they had seen the party of whom the troopers were in quest, as to discharge his pistol at the lad's head as he rode by, and the bullet grazed his temple. This rencontre convinced them at last that it was of no use to attempt reaching Worcester by the highroad, and they turned aside into the forest.

At first they kept as near to the roadside as possible ; but they were soon obliged to abandon even this precaution, and plunge deeper into the wood, trusting to their general knowledge of the direction in which the town of Worcester lay. Thus they toiled on for more than two hours, until, according to their reckoning, they ought to be approaching the banks of the Team. But the conviction had for some time past been growing upon them that they had wandered from the right track. Unhappily, there was no means of recovering it, or even of ascertaining the direction in which they had strayed. The autumnal day began to draw to its close, and they were sensible that if darkness overtook them, there would be no hope of extricating themselves before the morning.

"There is no help for it, Cuthbert," said Hugh.  
"We have lost our way, or we should have come

upon the river long ago. It is strange, too; for Worcester lies nearly due west of the highroad at the point where we quitted it; and we shaped our course in that direction, unless the sky deceived us."

"We took the wrong track, I judge, half an hour ago," replied Cuthbert, "when we were pursued by that company of Roundheads. I, at least, took but little note of the direction in which I ran. Let us retrace our steps, Hugh, without delay. If we can regain the place where they came upon us, we may yet reach the banks of the Team before night."

Adopting this suggestion, they followed the track of their footsteps for some little distance, until they reached an open glade in the forest, covering perhaps an acre or two of ground. But in this spot, the short dry turf, hardened by the August sun, retained only here and there any impression of their feet, and they were soon obliged to give up the attempt. Hugh then climbed the highest tree he could find, in the hope of discovering the summit of St. Andrew's spire, or at least the outline of the Malvern Hills, which might give them some clue to their present position. But this too proved futile. Nothing but a sea of foliage could be discerned in any direction. Hugh had just given

this unwelcome intimation to his cousin, and was on the point of descending the tree, when the latter heard a noise behind him, and, looking round, saw eight or ten mounted soldiers emerge from the nearest thicket, riding at a smart trot directly towards him. Cuthbert might have made his escape, if he had been willing to abandon his companion ; but this was not to be thought of, and he stood quietly at the foot of the tall beech which Hugh had climbed until the horsemen came up. As they drew near he was much comforted by the discovery that the new-comers were evidently Cavaliers, and therefore friends. Their first words, however, did not much accord with this view of the matter.

“ Whom have we here ? ” exclaimed the leader of the party, reining in his horse as his eye lighted on Hugh, who had just dropped from the lowest bough of the tree. “ Lay hold on them, Oakford. We must make sure that we leave no spies behind us to betray the place of our retreat.”

“ You need not fear that we should betray you,” said Hugh, as Oakford alighted from his horse to obey the order. “ We are loyal subjects of King Charles, and well-wishers to all his friends, to whom, as I perceive from your attire, you belong.”

“ Indeed ! ” remarked the horseman ; “ but we

must have more than your bare word for that, methinks. What is your name and place of abode, and whither are you now going?"

"I am called Hugh Lydford," returned the lad, his cheek reddening at the other's speech. "My father, Master Miles Lydford, is an officer in Warington's regiment. We heard an hour or two since that he has been badly hurt in to-day's fight, and are now on our way to afford him what help we may."

"Lydford, said you—Miles Lydford? I crave your pardon, young sir. I know your father right well, who is as stout a soldier and true a gentleman as has drawn sword this day. I grieve to hear that he is wounded. And who is your companion?"

"Cuthbert Lang, my cousin. We have missed our way in the forest, and know not how we may recover it. Can you render us any help?"

"Pardy, my young friend," said a Cavalier who rode on the right hand of the first speaker; "but you may judge for yourself that we are in no case to bestow help on others. Come, Markham, we cannot linger here."

"You can trace our hoof-marks, if you will," said the rider who had first spoken. "They will doubtless in time lead you to Worcester, though

by a somewhat devious route. But if you will accompany us a short distance, Gregory Oakford, who is about to return to Worcester, will be your guide thither. Are we near this hut or lodge of yours, or whatever you call it, Gregory?" he pursued, turning to the man who had dismounted at his command, but had now again resumed his saddle. "Methinks, from your description, we ought to have reached it ere this."

"It is scarce a hundred yards distant, Master Markham," replied Oakford; who, as Hugh now remarked, wore the dress of a forest ranger. "Come with us, if you will, Master Lydford, and I will render you any help that may be in my power. But we must hasten on."

He struck spurs into his horse, and the whole party moved on at a rapid pace, Hugh and his cousin following at the best of their speed. They proceeded along a narrow path between the trees, until Oakford suddenly checked his steed at a place where two bay-trees grew close together; and, calling on his companions to follow him, began forcing a passage between them. The others obeyed, and found themselves in a path similar to the one they had just quitted, but so screened on every side by ilexes and other evergreens as to be completely invisible from the


outside. Pursuing this path for a hundred yards or so, the forester turned again abruptly to the right, and led the party into a small clearing, in the centre of which stood a cottage constructed with rough timber and thatched with reed. It appeared at first sight to be the hut of a wood-cutter, or it might be the retreat of some lawless characters who had fled from society, and lived partly by woodcraft, and partly by the plunder of travellers. But a closer examination of the building produced a different impression. Its construction had clearly been a work of time and labour; and more taste was displayed in its decoration than was consistent with the notion of its being the residence of an ordinary dweller in the forest. The façade was unusually well-proportioned and picturesque; the porch was worked in diamond patterns, executed with neatness and skill; and the windows leaded, after the grotesque fashion seen in the houses of the upper classes at that time. Inside, the appearance of things confirmed the same idea. There were three apartments—one of some size used as a parlour, and two smaller chambers leading out of it, in each of which was a bedstead of solid oak. The outer room was furnished with a table, two chairs, and a large press—all of the same material as the

bedsteads. On the hearth lay the ashes of a wood fire which had evidently been long extinct.

"Good sooth!" exclaimed the Cavalier whom Oakford had addressed as Markham, "this is a snug place enow; but your Puritan ever knows how to take reverent care of his own comfort, however sharply he may reprove the luxuries of the Malignants, as he is pleased to term us. If you were sure that he would not return hither, I should account it no great hardship to lie perdu here awhile—in place of crossing the Channel to France—until the king shall get his own again."

"I cannot be sure that he may not return any day," said Oakford. "My acquaintance with him commenced, as I told you, quite accidentally; and though he often used my services in procuring supplies from Worcester, which he had a great dislike to visiting, he never confided any of his secrets to my keeping. It was only about a month ago that he told me he was about to go on a distant journey, and take his grandchild with him. He might return, he said, or he might not; but a few weeks would in all likelihood determine the question, one way or the other."

"A truce to thy Roundhead," said the other Cavalier, yawning as he spoke. "We have heard enough of him methinks, and to spare. His hut is



a convenient spot enough for us to rest in; and certes we need rest, for neither we nor our cattle can go further. It is well we fell in with thee and thy comrade, good Oakford, or we must needs have bivouacked *al fresco* in the greenwood, even had we succeeded in finding as safe a hiding-place."

"Master Markham shall always command my best services," returned Oakford, "as well as those of Richard Green also. We do not forget the brave gentleman on whose estate we were reared, and from whom we first acquired our knowledge of woodcraft. Can I pleasure you in aught further, gentlemen, before I take my departure for Worcester?"

"I know of nothing," returned Tracy, "except you can furnish us with somewhat whereon to break our fast—a contingency of which there appears small chance, unless we cook one of our horses for supper, as many a stout fellow has been driven to do ere this."

"No, we must keep Lent till Green returns, I suppose," said Markham, "though, pardy, it is the sharpest penance I ever underwent, seeing I have not had bite or sup since daybreak, and it is hungry work, fighting, too."

"I do not think it wholly impossible that we



might find some provision in yonder cupboard," said Oakford. "Old Halkett was ever wont to keep a good store of provisions by him ; and his departure at the last was of the suddenest. Ha ! it is even so," he added a minute afterwards, as the doors of the oak press gave way, under the pressure of the wood-knife which he had inserted between them, and displayed a pile of salted meats, and loaves of bread—the latter of the stalest to be sure, and somewhat mouldy, but welcome fare nevertheless, to men as hungry as Markham and his comrades. A shout of satisfaction greeted Oakford's discovery ; and in five minutes more the whole party were seated round the oak table, or on the floor of the hut, devouring their repast with the relish that hunger and fatigue imparted to it. Even Hugh and Cuthbert were glad to take their share, having eaten nothing since the midday meal. At length the supper came to a conclusion, and Oakford rose once more to depart. But before he had quitted the room, a man dressed in the same uniform as himself hurriedly entered into the cottage. "I crave your pardon for my haste, gentlemen," he said, "but I have tidings for your ears which brook no delay. Upton is occupied by a regiment of horse. They have seized upon all the shipping ; and you will

certainly be taken, if you attempt to escape from thence."

"Saw you, Master Waldron? and did you mention my name?" inquired Markham.

"I accosted him and asked him to walk apart with me, as I had a message from Master Markham, which was of much moment. But he said he knew no such person, and did no business with strangers: and thereupon he cut me short without further speech."

"The wary old caitiff," said Markham. "Yet he is as true as steel, and would aid me if it were possible. Doubtless his intention was to warn me not to venture near him."

"He is right in that," said Green. "It would be madness to make the attempt. I did but purchase a few loaves of bread, which I had to declare were for mine own use, and hastened away with all speed. I fear your plight is, in any case, an evil one. They have conceived the notion that many Cavaliers of distinction — King Charles himself among them—have taken refuge in the wood."

"They are mistaken in that, at all events," said Tracy. "I saw his Majesty, God bless him, ride off in company with the Scots, in the opposite direction. But, Markham, these tidings are most

serious. The Roundheads will guard all the avenues of the forest."

"They have begun to do so already," interposed Green. "Before to-morrow at noon every outlet will be secured. Nay, they have commanded all the rangers to present themselves at General Fleetwood's quarters at daybreak, fearing, I suppose, that we should abet the king's escape."

"Ha, then, we must depart at once," said Tracy; "but whither? that is the question."

"What say you to seeking shelter with Warrington?" suggested Markham. "I heard him say that he—he, and Percy, and Leslie, and Winthrop, and I know not how many more—had resolved, if the day went against them, to retire to Clidesford; and that they would engage to hold their own against all the prick-eared scum that ever swore the Covenant. I passed the castle with my troop, as we marched to Worcester. It is a strong place, and well victualled, they told me. If they have a sufficient force for the defence, they may make their boast good, until the king raises another army."

"He will scarce do that, Markham," said Tracy. "This last rout is like, I fear, to be a decisive one. Nevertheless, I am well-minded to accompany you to Clidesford. Warrington may make his defence

good, until they grant him reasonable terms of surrender. But at all events it will be better work there, even though one should get knocked on the head, than to be caught by these Roundheads, and strung up to the boughs of the nearest tree—as is their present fashion when they are cumbered with too many prisoners.”

“Have with you, then,” said Markham. “We must set forth without loss of time. The moon sets early, and if we do not avail ourselves of her light, we are like to have no other. Are you sure you know your way through the forest?”

“Know the way? What, I?” returned Tracy, in surprise. “I have never been there in my life. I presumed, from your suggesting it, that the road thither was familiar to you.”

“I have seen it only once, and that by daylight,” returned Markham. “But perhaps some of the men may chance to be acquainted with the road thither.”

“It is scarce likely,” said Tracy. “They are almost all from the eastern counties. But I will ask them.”

“There is no need,” said Cuthbert, who had been talking apart with Hugh during this dialogue. “There is no need to inquire further. If you will accept of my guidance, I can not only lead you to

Clidesford, but am acquainted with a secret passage, by which you can obtain admission to the castle. Under present circumstances it would scarce be safe of you to approach the walls, unless your persons were well known to the warders."

"And who are you, my brave lad?" inquired Tracy. "The same, I think, whom we encountered an hour or two since in the wood. But you said you were in urgent haste to reach Worcester, to attend some one who had been wounded in the fight, did you not?"

"My cousin and myself are anxious to render what succour we may to my uncle, who is reported to have been wounded in the encounter on the Team. But we cannot find our way to the spot without the help of the foresters, for the hope of journeying in whose company we have waited here. My cousin Hugh, however, is willing to go on alone, rather than not at all. And if you will request Master Oakford to accompany him thither, I will in requital conduct you in safety to Clidesford."

"It shall be a bargain, boy," said Markham. "Yet, hold, did I not hear you say that you had lost your way in the wood in coming from Clidesford? If so, it were scarce wise for us to trust ourselves to your guidance."

"You are right," replied Cuthbert, "but we only missed the track because a party of Roundheads drove us into the depths of the woods. If Master Oakford will lead us to the nearest point of the Worcester road, I know the way through the forest as well as I do that to the village church at home."

"Let us start without further parley," said Markham. And in a few minutes the whole party had set out—Hugh and Cuthbert riding, the former on Oakford's saddle, and the latter behind Tracy himself.

"The ground is softer here," remarked Hugh to Oakford, after they had ridden a mile or so. "Are you not afraid lest the marks of your horses' feet should be traced?"

"It will signify little," replied Oakford. "The concealment of the cottage is old Halkett's secret, not mine. Besides, I doubt whether any one would discover the opening between the bay-trees, even if they did trace the hoof-marks to that point. But we are now within a few hundred yards of the Worcester road," he added, drawing rein and addressing Markham and Tracy. "Yonder it runs, just beyond that belt of shrubs. We must part company."

The two parties separated accordingly, Markham


having first commended Hugh to Oakford's protection, and requested him besides to do all in his power for the rescue of Miles Lydford ; and the foresters, accompanied by Hugh, resumed their journey for another half-hour or so, when Oakford once more halted.

"Yonder runs the river," he said, in a low tone, "and just on the further bank is the spot where the battle was fought between Fleetwood and Montgomery this morning. Many a brave fellow is lying dead or wounded but a few hundred yards from us. Do you see yonder boat?" He pointed as he spoke to one moored to the bank at a short distance. "You can cross in that. I was afraid you would have had to swim for it. Make for the bed of osiers yonder ; when you have crossed, you can creep up under its shade unobserved. And hark you, lad, we will stay here to render you what aid we may, until an hour before daybreak. Now good night, and luck attend you."

Hugh thanked him, and, creeping cautiously down, entered the boat, which he paddled as noiselessly as possible across the river, landing safely on the further side.

## CHAPTER IV.

## AFTER THE BATTLE.

 F there be any scene of human folly and misery upon which the Enemy of mankind may be believed to gaze with especial satisfaction, it is a battle-field some few hours after the termination of the conflict. All the pomp and excitement of war has departed; all its sadder and darker features are left. Every kind of suffering to which humanity is liable seems to have been collected together to form one ghastly exhibition of misery—every evil passion let loose, to vent itself without restraint, in all its hideousness. The encounter on the banks of the Team had hardly amounted to more than a sharp skirmish, and the number of dead and wounded who lay scattered around was comparatively small. But there were enough, nevertheless, to inspire at once the utmost horror and compassion. Here lay a Fifth Monarchy man, as the extreme fanatics of those times were called, offering audibly his prayers to Heaven for the



deliverance of the elect, and the destruction of their enemies—his supplications mingling in horrible incongruity with the blasphemous ravings of the Cavalier at his side. Here a trooper, regardless of all but himself, strove to staunch the blood which was slowly draining his life away; and close beside him another, almost crushed by the weight of the charger which had fallen upon him, struggled in vain, with alternate entreaties and curses for aid, to extricate himself from the suffocating load. At a short distance, a man splendidly armed, who had evidently received a mortal hurt, was feebly imploring the help of the wretch who had stolen into the field for purposes of plunder, and who stripped him of his rich accoutrements, as heedless of the agony he inflicted as though he had been engaged in pillaging a corpse. Hugh's blood ran cold as his ear caught the entreaties and execrations addressed to him, while he hurried from group to group, only lingering long enough near each to ascertain that the sufferer of whom he was in search was not to be found there. He was compelled to turn a deaf ear to cries for help, with which the hardest heart could not, under other circumstances, have refused compliance.

Nor did the dead present a less appalling spec-

tacle than the living. The pale moonlight fell upon faces still bearing the imprint of the passions by which they had been animated at the moment of death—horror and alarm expressed by some; implacable hatred and defiance no less legible upon others; the prevailing expression, in the instance at least of the Puritans, being the stern fanaticism which had swayed them through life. In some places corpses were scattered here and there, at rare intervals, the men having been cut down or overtaken by the shot in the moment of flight; in others, where a hand-to-hand encounter had taken place, they were piled thick one upon another, in strangely assorted heaps—veteran and raw recruit, officer and private, Roundhead and Cavalier, mixed together in every conceivable attitude of agony and despair. Hugh continued to hurry on for more than an hour from place to place, and had traversed a considerable portion of the field, when he perceived at a little distance several men coming towards him, whom by their dress he knew to belong to the regiment of Ironsides. Aware that it would in all likelihood be fatal to his purpose if he allowed himself to fall into their hands, he crouched down unperceived amongst a pile of slain; and in a minute or two afterwards they approached the spot where he

was lying. The first words they spoke told him that they were in quest of the same person as himself, though, it need scarcely be added, with a very different purpose.

"He is not here," said the man who seemed to be the leader of the party, after hastily examining the bodies of which the heap was composed, "and yet it is strange. Salathiel Baines affirmed positively that he saw Lydford cut down, by one of his own troop, and that he was too severely hurt to have escaped from the field. From his description of the place where this occurred, it must be somewhere near where we are now standing. Was it not so, Peterson?"

"Of a verity it was," replied Job. "Salathiel said that Lydford was wounded not long after they had crossed the river, at a distance of two or three hundred yards from the bank, and near the garden fence of the farm-house. This must be the spot, if I rightly understood him."

"Had we not better separate, captain," said another of the party, "and each examine the ground lying round this point, though in different directions? We lose time, methinks, by keeping together."

"That is well thought of, Oliver Freeborn," said Walters. "But are you sure you know

Lydford's person sufficiently well to recognize him?"

"Know him?" answered the other. "I am scarce like to forget him. Do I not owe this sword-cut to him?" He pointed as he spoke to the scar which rendered his harsh features still more unsightly. "With such a token as that, I shall hardly forget him! But how are we to deal with him, if we succeed in our search? You have given us no special directions on that head."

"Nay, I care not greatly," returned Walters. "I would gladly have him as my prisoner. Yet his death would but save me a trouble," he continued in a lower tone, as if speaking to himself. "He will never consent to my suit, that is certain, and he would be well removed from my path. Yes," he said, once more aloud, "I care not how you bring him: alive or dead, you shall have the same reward."

The party then dispersed, Freeborn and the others giving vent to a brutal laugh as they heard this latter assurance. Hugh, waiting till they had removed to a sufficient distance to render it safe for him to quit his hiding-place, recommenced his search—his anxiety greatly increased by the conversation which he had just heard. In an agony of apprehension, but with the utmost caution, he

moved on to a part of the field which he had not yet explored, hoping every moment that the moonlight would disclose the features of which he was in quest, yet dreading almost equally that their discovery would be but the prelude to disaster and death. He had almost persuaded himself, notwithstanding the assurance which he had received to the contrary, that his father must have been removed from the field, or had retained sufficient strength to effect his own escape, when he heard, close at hand, the voices of two men speaking in low but evidently unfriendly tones to one another. Both voices appeared familiar to him. He paused, and looked cautiously around. Stretched on his back, under the cover of a thick bed of osiers, lay an officer, armed after the ordinary fashion of the Cavaliers, while a dark figure bent over him, grasping with one hand the throat of the prostrate man, and holding a long sharp dagger in the other.

Hugh crept stealthily nearer to the spot, and as he did so his ear caught distinctly the words which they were interchanging.

"It is in vain that you would avoid an answer," said the man who grasped the dagger. "I know you well. You are the pestilent traitor Miles Lydford, of whom the godly Captain Walters is

even now in search. See you this wound ? It was dealt me by your hand, on the field of Newbury, and sorely am I moved to requite you with its fellow, or a worse one, without further parley."

"Leave me to die in peace," exclaimed Lydford, feebly. "It will avail you nothing to torture me thus. I have not a tester left in my purse, nor aught that would repay you the trouble of taking. If you seek revenge for a blow given in fair fight, strike your dagger home, and have done with it."

"Softly, Master Miles. Your purse may be empty, and I doubt not it is. But you know well where to find more. Hark in your ear. Our worthy captain has promised me twenty broad pieces if I bring you a prisoner to his quarters ; or if I find that too troublesome a job, he will pay the like sum for your head, which is more easily carried. Will you give me forty if I leave it on your shoulders ? "

"I will not give you a groat, murdering villain," returned Lydford, as loudly as his weakness would permit. "I remember you well, now. Your name is Oliver Freeborn, as doubled-dyed a scoundrel as any these evil times have engendered. It was by your treachery that my comrade, Pierce Heyford, lost first his estate and afterwards his life, when you had induced him to trust to your offers.

Hands off! If I must die, I must; but I will not brook your hand on my collar."

He struggled to rise as he spoke, with an effort which caused the blood to rush in torrents from his wounds. Freeborn raised his weapon, and the next moment would have plunged it into the old man's bosom if Hugh, who had been warily creeping closer to the spot, had not at that moment discharged his petronel. He was scarcely three paces distant when he did so, and the shot proved instantly fatal. Unable even to raise a cry of alarm, the ruffian fell forward in the very act of striking, while his weapon was buried harmlessly in the turf.

"Hush, hush, my father," exclaimed Hugh, hurrying up. "Raise no cry, or it will be our death. The villain spoke no more than the truth when he said that Hubert Walters was in search of you. He is even now traversing the field with his bloodhounds. I fear lest his ear, or that of one of his companions, should have caught the discharge of the petronel."

"Ha! Hugh, my brave lad!" ejaculated the old Cavalier joyously, and paying but little heed to his son's words. "Is it indeed you? I scarce hoped to have seen your face again. Whence come you? Are our friends at hand?"

"There is no one here but myself. We have no time to speak of aught but your safety. Can you rally your strength sufficiently to quit the field with my help?"

"I will try, boy; but the Roundhead who struck me down had a heavy arm. But that his sword glanced somewhat aside, as he delivered his stroke, I had never stirred more. I have contrived to crawl sideways, like a crab, to the shelter of the osiers; but I could get no further. Lend me your arm, and we will see if I can manage better by its help."

He struggled to his feet as he spoke, and, supported by Hugh, staggered a few yards onwards towards the bank of the river, which lay scarce a stone's throw from them. Hugh looked anxiously round, and to his great satisfaction perceived that the boat still lay moored at the same spot where he had left it. At the same moment he caught sight of some dark figures hurrying towards them, attracted doubtless by the shot which he had lately fired. Not a moment was to be lost if they were to effect their escape. Half supporting, half dragging along the wounded man, Hugh was enabled to reach the boat, while the pursuers were still a hundred yards off. By a great exertion, Lydford was got on board, and Hugh, seizing the



oar, instantly pushed off from the shore. The river was not half crossed, when Walters and his followers came up, shouting to the fugitives to return. Perceiving that Hugh had no intention of obeying, one of the party levelled his musket and fired. The bullet struck the oar close to Hugh's hand, dashing it from his grasp, and causing Hugh to fall prostrate on the bottom boards of the boat—a fortunate accident for him, as Walters's gun was discharged a moment afterwards, with so true an aim that the bullet would have pierced his heart had he retained his former posture. Before the Roundhead could reload, the fugitives had safely landed on the opposite bank, and disappeared beneath the dark foliage of the wood.

Peterson uttered a fierce exclamation of disappointment. "If the rapids had not caught the boat at that moment, just as I fired, they would have been dead or our prisoners now," he said. "But they have escaped us this time."

"Not so. We shall have them yet, if we can cross the stream," said Walters. "I could not distinguish their movements very clearly, but I could see that the old man was badly hurt, and could scarce drag himself along. A bold swimmer could easily cross the stream at this point, and return with the boat. Were I able to

swim myself, I had plunged in ere this. As it is, I will give five gold pieces to the man who will perform the feat."

Peterson and the others looked somewhat blankly at one another, as though each expected the other to speak first.

"I am no swimmer," said Hinchcliffe, after a pause, "and it would need a practised hand to breast this stream. Oliver Freeborn would be the man to make the essay, if he were at hand now."

"Oliver Freeborn will never swim stream again," said Rumbold, another of Walters's followers, who at that moment came up; "he has been shot through the brain not ten minutes since. I passed his corpse close to the osier copse, as I ran hither."

"That was the shot, then, which we heard just now," said Peterson, "and most probably it was fired by the young imp who has just succeeded in carrying his father safe out of our hands. Of a verity, I owed him one grudge for the trick he and his cousin played off on us last spring. I have a second account against him now, which I will pay with interest when occasion serves."

"Enough of this trifling," interposed Walters angrily. "If there is not a man among you bold enough to swim a river like this, we must cross by

some other means. Rumbold, fetch hither the horses, and we will set forth at once."

The man was about to obey, when a soldier rode up, and presented a sealed packet to Captain Walters.

"From His Excellency the Lord General," he said. "I was directed to give this to your honour without loss of time two hours ago; but I inquired for you in vain at your quarters, and have been searching yonder field for this hour past."

Walters opened the despatch and perused it rapidly. "The Lord General attaches too much weight to my poor services," he said. "I cannot thank him sufficiently for the grace he does me. Bear back my humble duty to him, and say that I have no writing materials at hand, but I will with all promptitude obey his pleasure. Yet this is so far unfortunate," he resumed, when the messenger had departed, "that I am unable to follow up the pursuit myself. Peterson, I must commit this to you and Hinchcliffe; and beware how you fail me this second time. Mount and make with all speed for the ferry. It is scarce two miles distant. There cross and follow the bank of the river till you reach the spot where yonder boat lies moored. You can easily trace the track of the fugitives. It

is impossible they can escape you, unless through negligence or treachery."

"You shall have no cause to accuse us of either," said Hinchcliffe sullenly. "Where are we to join you when we return?"

"At my quarters in Worcester," said Walters. "I am about to set off for Clidesford, as soon as I shall have completed my preparations; but that will scarce be before morning. If I have already set forth, lodge the prisoners in Worcester gaol, and ride after me."

Meanwhile Hugh and his father had with much difficulty succeeded in reaching the spot, where Oakford and Green were still awaiting them. "You have arrived just in time, my lad," said the former. "My comrade and I could not have tarried a quarter of an hour longer."

"I thank you with all my heart," said Hugh, "but I fear, after all, your good offices will avail us but little. We have contrived almost by a miracle to escape our enemies. But they are already on our track, and can hardly fail to overtake us."

"Nay, do not say so," said Oakford cheerily. "Many a bullet goes wide of the mark, though it be skilfully shot. Help me, Green, to support Master Lydford into the saddle, and then you, young sir, can mount behind him. In two hours,

or three at most, you will reach the cottage, even allowing for several halts on the way."

"Alas! they will be here in less than an hour," said Hugh. "They will cross at Hingstone's ferry, and that is scarce a mile distant; and, besides, the hoof-marks will guide them only too surely. Nevertheless, I will make the attempt, for it is our only hope, and will try to keep a good heart too."

"Well spoken," said Oakford; "and for the hoof-marks, you need be under no alarm. I and my comrade have been employed on a little matter of farriery, and have reversed the horses' shoes. That was a trick I learnt many a year ago when I was in Master Markham's service. And as for their crossing the ferry, Joe Hingstone is my good comrade, and is sometimes deaf of both ears when folks are anxious to cross. But we must tarry no longer, or we shall scarce reach the ferry before they do, notwithstanding that we have but half the distance to go."

By this time Hugh was firmly seated behind his father, who was just able with his son's assistance to sit upright. The journey proved tedious and difficult even beyond his anticipations. The exertion of supporting Lydford's burly frame, now rendered almost helpless by increasing debility, was so great that he was repeatedly obliged to

dismount and relieve his weariness by a change of posture; and several times the old man was so exhausted, that Hugh feared that, in spite of his utmost exertions, he would fall from his saddle. The morning was far advanced before the glade in the forest was reached, and soon afterwards the two bay-trees, between which lay the secret entrance to the cottage. Here he took fresh precautions to prevent the possibility of being traced. Unstrapping the forester's cloak, which had been secured to the saddle-bow, he laid it down between the shrubs, so that the horse's feet produced no mark at all on the soil. A few minutes afterwards they reached the cottage, which did not show any marks of having been visited since he had quitted it a few hours before. Lydford was soon consigned to the most comfortable of the two beds; his wounds were dressed to the best of Hugh's ability; and the latter had the satisfaction of seeing his patient, after a draught of water, sink into a profound slumber. He then retired to the outer room of the hut, and made an examination of the contents of the oaken press. There were provisions enough, he reckoned, to last them a fortnight or more; and the loaves, which Green had fortunately brought in after the meal was concluded, were fresh and good. There was also

plenty of provender for the horse ; and the spring behind the cottage furnished an ample supply of water.

“We have been so far fortunate beyond our utmost hopes,” he thought. “But what is to become of us when the provisions fail? However, I will not be out of heart. Providence, which has befriended us so far, will not surely fail us now.”

## CHAPTER V.

## THE SECRET PASSAGE.

**H**UBERT WALTERS rode over to Clidesford on the following morning, to assume, by General Cromwell's order, the command of the forces sent to besiege Clidesford Castle. This was a mark of the General's confidence in his follower, and had further been accompanied by a promotion to the colonelcy of one of the most distinguished regiments in the service. Most men would have been elated, or at all events inclined to be good-humoured, under such circumstances. But Walters's demeanour did not evince any such satisfaction. He was moody and irritable to such an extent as somewhat to surprise his attendants ; towards whom, though stern and peremptory, he was rarely impatient. They had proceeded nearly half-way to Clidesford, when they were joined by Peterson and Hinchcliffe, whose crest-



fallen looks, as they rode up, at once attracted the leader's attention.


"You have not succeeded in tracing them," he exclaimed sharply. "I can read it in your faces. But we will speak of that presently. First let me hear what you have learned, that more effectual measures may be set on foot."

"We did everything that lay in our power, Colonel," said Hinchcliffe, laying a stress on Walters's newly-acquired title. "We rode to the ferry, as you commanded, though we were some time in reaching it, as some of the bridges across the brooks had been broken down. But when we arrived there, the ferry-boat was on the further side, and the ferryman would not answer our summons for an hour or more, though we hailed him again and again, till we were hoarse with shouting."

"That sounds strange," said Walters, bending his brow. "Would not your horses swim the stream, or did you fear to make the trial?"

"Cry you mercy," returned Hinchcliffe; "but the strongest horse I ever bestrode could not stem such a current as is now running there."

"And what excuse gave the knave ferryman, when he came at last?"



"He affirmed that he had been busy in shoeing a gentleman's horse for him—he is a smith, you know, as well as ferryman—and the noise of the hammering, he said, must have drowned our cries."

"That is scarce likely," said Walters, in the same incredulous tone as before.

"Of a verity it is not," observed Peterson. "Sorely do I doubt Joseph Hingstone's good faith in the matter, seeing that if any gentleman had ridden up, or taken his departure, while we were waiting on the opposite bank, we must needs have seen him."

"It shall be looked to," said Walters; "but proceed with your story. What ensued when you had succeeded in crossing?"

"We rode on with all possible speed, and soon reached the spot where the Lydfords made the passage of the river. The boat was still lying where they left it. We tracked their footsteps easily enough for some two or three hundred yards, but there——"

"Well, wherefore do you pause," asked Walters. "Of a verity," began Peterson——

"Drop that silly cant," exclaimed his principal, angrily, "and deliver your tale in plain

English. I am in no humour to be practised on!"

"The trace of footsteps altogether ceased," proceeded Peterson, in a different tone. "There were no marks to be found but those of horses' hoofs."

"Idiot!" shouted Walters; "did you not follow them up?"

"So please you," said Peterson, "they led only to a thicket at the distance of about a hundred yards, and there ceased altogether."

Walters drew in his horse, and looked sternly at his follower. "I think you dare not attempt to play me false," he said, slowly. "You know too well what your doom would be, if you did."

"On my word, I have not," exclaimed Peterson, submissively. "I cannot guess by what strange device we have been baffled this time; but if you will only still entrust this matter to me, I will engage within a few days to render into your custody, not only Miles Lydford and his son, but his wife and daughter as well."

"Nay, Master Job, that you will not," interposed Saunders. "You may catch the males, if you are lucky; but the women, I trow, are safe from your clutches."

"How mean you?" inquired Walters, turning round in haste to the man who had spoken.

"Nay, I doubt not they will fall into our hands ere long," replied Saunders, somewhat abashed. "I meant but to say that they had taken refuge at Clidesford, and we could hardly look, therefore, to capture them at present."

"Taken refuge in the castle?" said Hubert, hastily. "Mistress Lydford do you mean?"

"Ay, and Mistress Cicely too," returned Saunders. "I know those who saw them repair thither somewhat after dusk yester evening, and doubtless they have taken such money and valuables as they could carry away with them."

"The garrison are unwise to cumber themselves with women," remarked Walters shortly, appearing at the same time to dismiss the subject from his thoughts. "No," he resumed, turning to Peterson, "I will not trust you again in this matter. Here, you, Morgan Rumbold, do you undertake it. You have a ready wit enough, and are not overtroubled with scruples. And if report say true, you have had a goodly experience of this kind of job!"

"Ay, ay," returned Rumbold. "When I served in my namesake's band I have tracked more run-


always than I have groats in my purse. But we had the help of the dogs then."

"You may have them now," said Walters, "if you will. Some have been sent for to Worcester, and when they arrive, one shall be placed at your service. But we must hasten on."

He struck spurs into his horse, and the whole party resumed their route for Clidesford.

Meanwhile Cuthbert and his companions had pursued their way by the light of the moon, observing every precaution against falling into the hands of the various companies of Parliamentarians, which were still afoot on one errand or another, and suffered no one to pass without a rigid scrutiny.

Cuthbert's knowledge of the country, however, proved to be equal to his professions, and the party made their way slowly but surely, until they were within two miles of the castle, when the light of the moon was withdrawn, and almost total darkness succeeded. Surrounded as they were by high trees on every side, it was scarcely possible to distinguish one object from another; and Cuthbert considering it unsafe to proceed further at present, bade his companions remain quiet, while he went out alone to reconnoitre.




He returned shortly after daybreak, with a very discouraging report. Troops had been sent from Worcester, he had discovered, for the purpose of laying siege to the castle; and they had already taken possession of the village, intercepting all communication between it and the besieged. It would be impossible to pass unnoticed. Their best hope lay in making a circuit of several miles and attempting the approach from the opposite quarter, which, so far as Cuthbert could learn, had not yet been occupied by the Roundheads. It was on that side that the secret entrance to the castle lay, and therefore, if they could succeed in evading the vigilance of the outposts, they would be tolerably sure of gaining their object. It was resolved, accordingly, to set out forthwith. But before doing so they took another precaution, which Cuthbert's ready wit suggested to them. In one of the glades through which they passed, a skirmish had taken place, apparently between a handful of fugitives from the battle and some peasants belonging to the Puritan faction, who had endeavoured to arrest them. Several of the latter lay dead, as well as one or two of Leslie's troopers.

By the advice of young Lang, they stripped the

corpses of the peasants, and put on their apparel, instead of their own. Cuthbert himself assumed the clothes of a woman, who had probably been killed by a stray shot, sustaining his new character with so much cleverness, that his companions, in spite of the anxiety of their position, could not help being amused. The party then resumed their way, making a wide *détour* of several miles, and carefully reconnoitring every opening in the wood before they emerged from it. This caused so much delay, that the day was far advanced by the time they had reached the point from which Cuthbert had proposed to reach the castle. He would still have waited until dusk, but that the rest of the company, who were ravenous with hunger, having eaten but one meal, and that a scanty one, since the morning of the previous day, insisted upon making the attempt at once. They soon discovered, to their dismay, that they had been mistaken in concluding that the enemy had not occupied the open country to the back of the castle.

When they had arrived within half a mile of the postern gate, they found the ground in possession of several companies, which were engaged in throwing up earthworks, their tents



being sheltered under a knoll which completely screened them from the observation of the besieged. The spot in which these operations were being carried on lay directly in the path leading to the secret passage ; nor could they reach the latter without passing the soldiers. It was, however, almost equally hazardous to turn back now ; as they had been seen by the Puritans, who would be almost sure to send after and question them, if they saw any attempt on their part to avoid notice.

They moved on, therefore, with as unconcerned an air as they could assume, and had just reached the first outpost, when, as ill-luck would have it, Hubert Walters, accompanied by Captains Saxby and Travers, two of the officers of his regiment, rode up to give instructions respecting the works which he had ordered to be commenced. His quick eye instantly caught sight of the group, which his soldiers would probably have overlooked.


"What, ho ! my masters," he cried, "come hither and render me an account of yourselves. What is your name ?" he continued, addressing Markham, who seemed to be the principal personage of the party. "Whither, and on what errand, are you now proceeding ?"



"I am called by the godly, Nehemiah Word-in-season," replied Markham, who, dressed in sad-coloured garments, black cloak, and a steeple-hat, bore the appearance of a travelling preacher. "I am called Nehemiah Word-in-season," he repeated—imitating, as well as he was able, the usual phraseology, as well as the twang of the day—"and I have been thought to have some gift in extracting the pith and marrow of a text, where the carnal cannot discern aught but dry bones, even as——"

"I doubt not your ability, worthy sir," interrupted Walters, who, though he had but little savour for the Puritanical section of his party, knew the necessity of treating it with respect, "but we have neither space nor opportunity for hearkening to you just now. Be pleased further to inform me who are your companions, and whither you are going. My duty obliges me to exercise the most careful vigilance ; and unless satisfied on these points, I cannot suffer you to pass."

"We are on our way to the dwelling of a pious man, even the precious Master Accepted Full-of-love," interposed Cuthbert, "where we hope to gather some comfortable crumbs of doctrine from this good man, and other reverend ministers of



the Word. And as his house lies at some distance still, and we are even now somewhat late, we pray you to let us pass by the nearest route."

Walters looked keenly at the speaker, as though he were but half-satisfied. Both Markham and Cuthbert had acted their part with a skill which nothing but their native wit, keenly stimulated by the emergency of their position, could have prompted. Nevertheless, there was something to his fancy in the general demeanour of the group which appeared suspicious. The sober-fashioned garments did not fit the wearers as though they had been made for them ; still less did the features and expression of the face of two or three of the number accord with their profession. Nor had it escaped his keen observation that they were all evidently anxious to avoid notice as much as possible ; which, considering that they were among friends, was somewhat strange.

"What think you of them?" he said apart to his brother-officers. "Their story sounds likely enough, and the Lord-General has been most particular in his injunctions to us not to give the preachers offence. Yet I am half inclined to inquire further ere I let them pass."

"The damsel seemed to me to speak discreetly,"

said Saxby. "And I have heard somewhat of this Master Full-of-love, who is reported to be a singularly pious and God-fearing man, in the midst of this crooked generation. I see not wherefore they should not be suffered to go free."

"And you, Travers?" asked Walters.

"My judgment is otherwise," said the officer addressed. "To my mind they have marvellously the air of strolling players, who are dressed to perform a part, which they but imperfectly understand. And that tall fellow, by the elm yonder—if he be not Roger Broadwood, whom we took prisoner one day, a fortnight or so since, and who made his escape the next morning—if he be not Roger Broadwood, I say, he is assuredly his twin-brother."

"Ha! are you certain of that?" inquired Walters, eagerly.

"As certain as a man may be," returned Travers, "who has seen another but once before, and then attired in buff coat and steel-cap, instead of a sad-coloured cloak and steeple-hat. I remember the cut of the rogue's features; and that bullet-mark on his right cheek, I think I could swear to. But question him yourself, Colonel, and you will soon judge whether I am mistaken or not."

"I will order his instant arrest," said Walters. He turned in his saddle and called to a party of soldiers, who were busy a few yards off with some artillery waggons, which had just come up. "What, ho! Hinchcliffe, Peterson, lay hands on yon stout fellow down by the elm there, and tie him hand and foot. Detain the others also, but treat them civilly."

But Cuthbert and his companions did not wait for their approach. The former, tearing off the skirt which embarrassed his movements, took to his heels the moment he heard the first words of Walters's speech, and, calling to the others to follow him, plunged into a thicket. Walters and his staff, who being on horseback were unable to follow, fired their petronels after the fugitives, shouting at the same time to the soldiers to pursue and capture them. But the latter had the advantage of a start of several minutes, and before the Roundheads could overtake them, had reached a spot not more than a couple of hundred yards distant from the castle walls. Here, however, it became evident that they could not escape. The Cavaliers, encumbered by their stiff habiliments, were no match for their enemies in point of speed, and being without arms could offer no resistance.

A summons to surrender, on pain of being forthwith fired upon, had already been given, and was on the point of being obeyed, when Cuthbert's quick eye caught sight of some figures on the battlements of the castle engaged in loading a falconet, as the long slender cannon of the time were called. He instantly flung himself at full length on the ground; and the next moment the piece was discharged, slightly wounding Tracy and Broadwood, and killing two of their pursuers. A minute afterwards another cannon, and then another, was fired. The Parliamentary soldiers took to flight, whilst Markham and his companions, imitating Cuthbert's example, crouched down among the underwood.

"This way, this way," shouted the latter, as he noticed the flight of the enemy. "If we can shelter ourselves from the fire for a few minutes, we are safe."

He crawled along on his stomach, availing himself of the shelter of a small dyke, which had once formed part of an outwork, until he reached the stump of an old oak-tree, overspread with ivy. Pulling aside the evergreens, which grew thickly over its lower parts, he thrust his hand into a hole beneath the roots, and drew open a small iron

door, fastened by a spring, which was concealed in the hollow of the stump.

"Follow me!" he exclaimed, "and let the last be careful to close the trap behind him."

He dived into the opening, legs foremost, as he spoke, and found himself at the head of a long flight of narrow stone steps, leading downwards at first almost perpendicularly, afterwards with an easier descent. The air of the passage was very close and earthy, and as dark as Erebus for the first hundred yards or so; then a glimmer of light became visible at some distance, which was found on a nearer approach to proceed from an iron grating, fixed in the outer wall of the moat, and masked from observation by a projecting parapet. At this point the path turned abruptly to the right, and another stone staircase presented itself, also lighted by a grating. This was as steep as the first had been, and led apparently to some point below the level of the moat. Descending cautiously with all possible speed, for the atmosphere here was so confined that it was with the greatest difficulty they could breathe, they traversed a long and damp stone passage. At the end of this, they came to a flight of steps, terminating in an iron grated door, through which

they could see into a stone dungeon of some kind, lighted by loopholes from the moat. The door gave way to the first attempt to open it, having been simply secured by a latch. But when they had gained admission to the chamber beyond, they found themselves entirely at a loss how to proceed further. The walls were to all appearance solid, unbroken by door or window, with the exception of the two narrow slits looking out upon the moat, while the stone vaulting of the roof presented no trace of trap-door or opening of any kind. Even Cuthbert could not help them here. He had only once before been conducted through the secret passage, when his aid had been desired, in a matter requiring the utmost privacy, and he had passed through it in so much haste as to be unable to make any observations. The entrance was, so far as he could remember, concealed in the vaulting in one of the corners of the roof, but all these appeared on examination equally immovable; and he could not recall in which of the angles it was situated. After many ineffectual efforts, the whole party stationed themselves opposite to the loopholes, and broke into one loud shout of "Long live King Charles!" They soon perceived that their ruse had succeeded so far as

to attract the attention of the garrison. Hurried steps were heard overhead, and the voices of men talking loudly with one another, until at last a large flag, ingeniously concealed in the ribbing of the roof, was thrown back, and the head and shoulders of a man holding a carbine in his hand became visible.

"Who are you, and what make you here?" he inquired, as his eye tried vainly to pierce the gloom in which the vault was enveloped. "Do not attempt to move, or your lives will be the forfeit."

"We are loyal Cavaliers and gentlemen," replied Markham, "escaped from Worcester field, and have assumed our present disguises the better to effect our purpose. Bear our greeting to Sir William Warrington, and tell him that Captains Tracy and Markham, Lieutenant Hewett, and Cornet Drake, of Hamilton's horse, solicit the shelter of his roof, together with Cuthbert Lang, nephew of Master Miles Lydford, and half a dozen stout fellows, whose service will well repay their board and lodging."

The messenger departed, and returned in a few minutes, accompanied by the owner of the castle himself. A ladder was lowered, by which the



whole party ascended, when they were heartily welcomed by Sir William and his lady.

"Body o' me!" exclaimed the worthy knight, as he clasped Markham's hand; "but I am as glad as if I had heard that some one had struck old Noll's head from his shoulders, as he did that of his royal master! Why, by what miracle did you escape? I saw you two, along with Hamilton and Careless and the rest, charge down Sidbury Street just as we contrived to extricate his Majesty from the press in the opposite direction. It was a brave deed; but I scarce hoped that any one among you would have come off alive. Why, man, there were ten to one, and stout rascals, too, to do them justice, for all that you drove them back at your first onset."

"Ay, they made short work with us when it came to hand-to-hand fighting," said Tracy. "But that we were enabled to turn down a narrow lane, the entrance to which was choked by the fall of some of our number, we had not lived to tell the tale. As it was, we reached the banks of the Severn, and swam our horses across it—such of us, that is to say, as were not drowned in attempting it. Thence we made straight for the forest, where we had the luck to fall in with one of the

verderers, an old servant of our house ; and afterwards with this brave lad, who has guided us hither. The tale of the cunning stratagem whereby he deceived the enemy will make you laugh, when you have space to hear it."

"Ha! Cuthbert, lad," said Sir William, smiling, "at your tricks again! Well, I will hear it to-morrow. At present it is ill talking between a full man and a hungry. Come this way, all of you, and provision shall be made for your refreshment and lodging. By my faith, stout fellows, all of them ; and we shall need their help, for I am fain to confess that we are somewhat shorthanded."

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE ENVOY.

**W**ALTERS had marked the escape of the Cavaliers with feelings of unmixed vexation. In particular, he was provoked that he should have failed to secure the person of Cuthbert Lang, whom he had recognized. A third member of the Lydford family had now slipped through his hands—a third opportunity of working upon Cicely's affection had been thrown away. He severely rated the men as they returned from their ineffectual pursuit; Peterson, in particular, being the object of his sarcasm.

"Blundering dolt!" he exclaimed, "this is now three times you have allowed yourself to be outwitted by a boy; and methinks it was but this very morning that I heard you vaunting among your companions that you would know this lad under whatsoever guise he might hide himself! Go to, sirrah! you are but an idle boaster, fit for

no better work than to clean armour and furbish camp-kettles; and to that, by Heaven! I will reduce you, if you do not speedily amend!"

"Of a verity," began Peterson, "we were wholly taken by surprise. The youth was so cunningly disguised that sharper eyes than mine, methinks, might have been deceived. And besides——"

"Away; I will have no more excuses," interrupted Walters, who perhaps remembered that his follower might on this occasion reasonably enough remind him that he himself had failed to penetrate Cuthbert's disguise. "Away with you to your duty; unless, that is to say, you have anything of importance to communicate."

"There is a scheme which has occurred to me," said Peterson, "whereby we might attain to a knowledge of Miles Lydford's hiding-place; which otherwise, to speak truth, may be somewhat hard to discover. They say that the hounds, of which your honour was speaking this morning, cannot be sent for a week to come; and, besides, the rain, which is plainly about to fall, will destroy the scent, even were they to arrive to-day."

"Well, what is the scheme?" asked Hubert, careful not to leave a stone unturned. "Is it of your devising?"

"Not altogether," said Peterson. "It was suggested in some sort, I must allow, by Hinchcliffe, It is, that you should send a cartel by a flag of truce into the castle, and offer the women, of whom there are several in the castle, a safe-conduct to any place of safety they may name."

"Ha! the women," exclaimed Walters, starting. "Offer a safe-conduct to the women, saidst thou? But how will that enable us to find Miles Lydford?"

"Even thus," returned Peterson. "The messenger may claim to be the bearer of a letter to Mistress Lydford or her daughter, and will so gain admission to the presence of the ladies themselves. He may then offer, for a large bribe, to convey a message, or render any help they desire, to Master Lydford, pretending to be one of his friends in disguise. Doubtless they are well acquainted with his lurking-place, or at least have learned it from that spawn of mischief, Cuthbert Lang."

Walters made no reply for several minutes: apparently the idea found more favour in his eyes than might have been expected under the circumstances.

"There is something in the scheme," he said at last. "But whom do you propose to send as the

bearer of the cartel? It might succeed; but only in the hands of a skilful and practised agent. You, yourself, I conclude, have no thought of undertaking it?"

"Of a verity," returned Peterson, modestly, "I know that my gifts lie not in that direction. The ways and the words of these men of Belial suit me not, nor could I train my tongue to that fashion; but my comrade, Reuben Hinchcliffe, in his youth served among the Malignants, and can season his language with the profane oaths, wherein they delight."

"I nothing doubt it," said Walters, drily. "But if I mistake not, Reuben Hinchcliffe accompanied you on your errand last night. Was it not so?"

"It was," said Peterson. "Yet, if you will permit me, I could satisfy your honour that the miscarriage of that affair happened through no fault of his, nor of mine either."

"I doubt not you have a good excuse," said Walters; "but they whom I trust are men who do the work whereon I set them, not they who find good excuses for not doing it. No, Peterson, I may act on your suggestion, but if so, will find another messenger. Say nought to Hinchcliffe,

but that I entertain not his scheme : yet do you yourself attend me early to-morrow morning."

After again inspecting the progress of the earth-works which were being thrown up, Walters returned to his quarters, where he shut himself up to mature the scheme which Peterson's proposal had suggested to him. This was to go himself to the castle, in the disguise of an envoy, as suggested by his follower, and so obtain a private interview with Cicely. He reflected that she could not be aware of the escape of her father and brother, and might well be induced to believe that they were both in his hands and at his mercy. If so, she might surely be prevailed on to accept the safe-conduct from the castle. Even if he could not persuade her to comply with his wishes, she would be anxious to see her father once more. He might feign that the old man had been sentenced to death, and had sent an urgent message to her to come and bid him farewell. It was a hazardous, nay, a desperate scheme, no doubt ; but Walters, with all his faults, was as regardless of danger as the wildest Cavalier of Prince Rupert's regiment : and he further reflected that the very hazard he incurred might perhaps give him a greater interest in Cicely's eyes than any argument he could urge.

He sat long, buried in anxious thought, fully resolved to essay the adventure, yet withal sensible of the folly with which others would charge him, were they cognizant of all.

"I am a fool," he said, starting from his seat, and pacing the narrow apartment with impatient steps. "I am a fool to fret thus for a weak girl—to imperil all that I have gained—nay, even my life itself—for one who is no whit more fair than others of her sex, nor differs from them in ought, save in the scorn and dislike wherewith she regards me. Why cannot I forget her? or, rather, why cannot I requite her aversion, as I would that of any one but herself? I could almost believe the old wives' tales of witches and sorcerers, when I think of it. Well, it *is* witchery, and the spell is too strong for me to break. She must, and she shall be mine. Yet she shall pay for it nevertheless, and for every pang of shame and mortification which she causes me. When the castle falls—and fall it will, as no one can doubt—she must of necessity become my prisoner. Were it not well to wait for that?" he pursued, stopping in his walk. "No, I cannot," he added, a minute afterwards. "I cannot bear the thought of the danger to which she will be exposed. Some unforeseen casualty, some stray bullet, may



deprive me for ever of the chance of possessing her. And besides, who knows but what she may find a lover in one of the hot-headed youths who have undertaken the defence of Clidesford? A time of common danger is a likely one for such an event. No, I will run the risk, be it ever so great."

Accordingly, early in the forenoon of the following day, a message was conveyed to Mistress Cicely Lydford from Sir William Warington, informing her that a flag of truce had arrived from the besiegers, bearing an offer to allow all women, who might chance to be inmates of Clidesford Castle, to depart in safety, and under an escort, to any place whither they might desire to be conveyed. Sir William had already replied, after a consultation with Dame Lydford and his own lady, to this proposal, and the mission of the envoy was thereupon ended. But the latter had further declared that he was the bearer of a message for Mistress Cicely's private ear from her father; in proof of which he produced a token, which had been intrusted to his hands by Miles Lydford, who had been taken prisoner after the battle, in order that he might insure herself of the truth of his mission. The knight therefore prayed Mistress Cicely to

inform him whether it was her pleasure that the soldier should be admitted to her presence.

The messenger found the maiden deeply interested in a conversation with her cousin, Cuthbert Lang, who had been detailing to her the history of his adventures, since they had parted, after the skirmish in the lane. He had judged it wiser to inform Cicely of the wound which her father was reported to have received, which, of course, must render his escape from the field more difficult and hazardous. But he tried to cheer her by pointing out that Hugh had, in Oakford and Green, two of the most valuable assistants he could have obtained. In any case she must endeavour to keep a stout heart, and hope for the best, if it were only for her mother's sake.

"True, Cuthbert," said Cicely, "we must trust to Providence in these evil times—good sooth, were it only that we have nought else to trust to. Yet it would be folly to conceal from ourselves the fact that my father's peril could hardly be greater, consistently with any hope at all."

It was at this point of the conversation that Sir William's message to Cicely was delivered, and the token presented to her. Both she and her cousin instantly recognized the peculiarly-shaped

buckle, with which Miles Lydford's sword-belt was secured. The latter had, in fact, been dropped by the old Cavalier on the banks of the Team, when he made his hurried escape, and picked up by Saunders. Cicely grew pale as death as her eye lighted on it. "He must indeed be a prisoner," she murmured, "or his enemies would never have gained possession of that."

"You had better see him," said Lang, "or if an interview be too painful to you, suffer me to do so."

"No, no," replied his cousin, "the message was for me. I will give him audience, and alone, as he desires. Leave me, Cuthbert; but wait outside in the corridor. I would fain have the comfort of your presence, so soon as he is gone."

Her cousin complied, and in a few minutes afterwards a man in the dress of a private of the regiment of Ironsides was ushered into the room, and the door closed behind him. Cicely looked closely at him as he entered. He wore the ordinary buff coat of a trooper, and a steel cap, from beneath which a quantity of black curly hair straggled forth, while a heavy moustache and beard concealed the lower half of his features. His complexion was unusually swarthy, and his

bizarre appearance was increased by a large plaster, apparently covering a wound recently inflicted, which extended from the right temple almost to the cheek-bone. He did not speak as Cicely had expected, and, after a minute or two of embarrassed silence, she was obliged to open the conversation.

"You have brought me a token," she said, "which I have reason to believe a true one, from my father, and are also, as I learn, the bearer of a message from him. May I pray you to communicate it to me forthwith, and inform me at the same time where he now is, and what is his present condition?"

"Alas! he is a prisoner, and in peril of his life. I may not disguise this from you, however deeply it may wound your ear. He is here in Clidesford, having been brought hither by our officer's command."

"And his message?" inquired Cicely.

"It is to entreat you to accept the safe conduct which, as he has learned, has been offered to the women within these walls. He knows the castle must fall, and would fain that your mother and yourself should be spared the horrors alike, and the fatal chances, of war."

"The offer is a kind one," said Cicely; "and my father's will is, of course, my law. But methinks it must have been to my mother rather than to myself that the message was addressed. Suffer me, I pray you, to speak a few words with her on the subject, and I will straightway return and render you my answer."

"No, it was to you, Mistress Cicely, to you only, that I was charged to deliver it. Nor have I told you the whole. I would indeed willingly have been spared the necessity of disclosing the worst. Master Lydford has been condemned to death, and would see you once more before his execution."

Cicely's cheek once more grew as white and cold as the marble table against which she leaned. "Let me go," she exclaimed, in a voice which had sunk almost to a whisper. "I cannot continue this conversation now, but will return when I am somewhat recovered. Call my cousin, Master Lang. He is outside in the corridor, and will lend me his arm."

She moved with trembling steps towards the door as she spoke; but the soldier interposed and placed his back against it.

"My business with you is a strictly private one,"

he said. "I cannot suffer you to impart it to any one else. Tell me at once, are you prepared to quit the castle in my company?"

His altered tone and manner struck her forcibly, notwithstanding her distress of mind. She looked keenly at him; and a vague idea that his person was not wholly unknown to her, for the first time suggested itself.

"Who are you?" she said. "You wear the dress of a common soldier, but your language and manner scarce accord with that station. I must inquire further. Stand aside, sir," she added, indignantly, as he once more interposed to prevent her quitting the apartment. "Inform me at once who you are and what is your true purpose, or I will this instant summon the guard."

"Ah! Cicely, have you not already guessed?" He removed, as he spoke, the steel cap and false hair along with it. "Who but Hubert Walters would have ventured thus alone, for your sake, into the midst of his enemies? Call the guard if you will, and requite my efforts in your behalf by delivering me over unto death. I care not to live, if I am to be shut out from your favour."

"This is madness, Master Walters," exclaimed

Cicely, divided between astonishment and admiration, which she could not withhold, for his boldness. "I need not tell you that I shall not betray your person; but I would know and at once wherefore you have ventured hither, since it cannot really be, as I think, for the sake of my father, or—myself."

"It is, it is, Cicely," returned Walters, reasserting his falsehood with unblushing hardihood. "Your father and brother are prisoners—*my* prisoners, for it is to me that General Cromwell has confided the conduct of this siege. I have offered a safe conduct to the women within the castle, in order that you may at once escape the hazard you must otherwise incur, and also in order that——"

"Say no more," retorted Cicely, the colour again tinging her cheek, as indignation prevailed over the feelings which had hitherto swayed her. "You would imply that I must buy my father's life by giving my hand to you, to whom I can never give my affection."

"Do not say so, Cicely," pleaded Walters in a softer tone. "Wherefore should you not love me? Remember how many years I have been true to you, and all other women have been as nothing in my sight. And do not speak of buying your

father's life. Nay, rather regard it as most happy that I should be enabled, through our union, to shelter you and yours from the troubles which must otherwise fall heavily upon them. Nay, you will yourself be enabled to extend a protecting hand to your kindred. I have already risen high in the Lord General's favour, and shall rise higher still; the time will come, believe me, when my wife will be among the greatest in the land."

"I desire no such grandeur," returned Cicely. "I would rather be the wife of a brave man, however humble his condition, provided he were true to his Church and King. If you indeed love me, Master Walters, do not ask a maiden to disobey a father's commands, or pledge an unwilling hand; but rather show your affection by protecting those whom she loves most dearly, and whose loss would break her heart. This would be noble, and, Roundhead though you are, I should honour and esteem you."

"Honour and esteem! Empty words, if your love go not with them! Think you I am weak enough to be content with these, or that I would help, perchance, some fortunate rival to the very prize I am resolved to win? Mark me, Cicely Lydford, and be wise. I have already told you



that the lives of your father and your brother are at my disposal. I now add that your own and your mother's are scarcely less so. Do you believe that this castle will long resist the force we can bring against it? Do you think that because our troops were compelled once to retire from before it, when Charles's generals had strong armies in the field, that the same will occur again now, when we are undisputed masters of the country, and can bring against it any number we may require? It must fall sooner or later, and you then will be my prisoner—to be dealt with, remember, according to my pleasure. You will then be glad to accept, not the terms which I now urge upon you, but any I may be pleased to offer."

"I will wait till that time comes," said Cicely, with flashing eyes. "I thank you for having shown me your true self. Know that my poor father, and brother too, would far rather die, than that I should be given in marriage to such as you. For myself, I will never be yours, be the alternative what it may. I, too, will willingly accept death in any shape, rather than such shame!"

The Puritan looked at her with an admiration which for the moment overpowered the feelings of mortification and anger, which her words would

otherwise have called up. She stood with clasped hands, and her figure drawn to its full height ; her long dark hair had escaped from the band which encircled it, and fell in rich masses on her breast and shoulders.

In her sparkling eye and flushed cheek might be read the indomitable spirit of her race. Joan of Arc might have looked thus at her captors, when they proposed to her the alternative of a false confession or an ignominious death. Never had she appeared so beautiful in Walters's eyes ; nor was his determination ever stronger to win her at all hazards. For a moment the idea suggested itself to him—insane as it was—of carrying her off by force, even from the midst of his enemies and the strong walls by which he was surrounded. He glanced rapidly round the chamber.

It was situated, not in the central keep, but in the outer buildings of the castle, and the eastern battlement ran in front of the windows, at a distance of five or six feet from them. One of the casements stood open, and there was room for a man to force his way through the aperture. But the moat lay immediately beneath, at a depth of nearly thirty feet, with an embattled wall beyond it. Sentinels, moreover, were placed at every

angle of the building, and the whole garrison under arms. The project was wholly impracticable. He must bide his time, trusting to the chances of war and his own scheming brain. He was about to resume his helmet and false hair, and take his leave of Cicely, when the door suddenly opened, and Cuthbert Lang presented himself.


"Why, cousin," he exclaimed, "is your interview to last for ever? Here has Sir William Warington sent Rufford and Heyworth to require the messenger's presence, since he would fain speak to him ere he leaves the castle. Ha!" he exclaimed, as his eye fell upon the Roundhead, who had not had time to replace his disguise. "Hubert Walters, by heavens! Here is treachery of some kind. Surrender, without parley, as our prisoner, or you shall be cut down without mercy!"

"Nay, no violence, Cuthbert," interposed Cicely, "Remember he is a messenger with a flag of truce, and as such must be permitted to depart in safety."

"Messenger! flag of truce!" shouted Cuthbert. "He is no messenger, but a spy in disguise, and as such merits instant death. Help, without

there, Rufford, Marks, Heywood ! Seize the traitor ! ”

The sound of footsteps was heard in the passage. But Walters, at Cuthbert's first exclamation, had stepped deliberately to the door, and locking it in the face of his pursuers, thrust the key into his pocket. Then drawing a short sword from beneath his vest, he dashed Cuthbert to the ground as he strove to seize him, and, rushing to the window, stepped out on the battlement. A sentinel, who had caught the alarm, hurried up, presenting his petronel ; but a blow from Walters's weapon, laid him at his feet. Flinging himself over the parapet, he caught hold of a projecting gargoyle, and thence dropped into the moat ; then swimming to the drawbridge, which had been lowered for his admission, he clambered lightly up, and flung himself over the further wall. By this time the alarm had spread through the castle. The battlements were lined with men-at-arms, who took aim at the fugitive, as soon as he appeared beyond the outer line of defences. One ball struck the steel corslet, hurling him forward upon his face ; another cut the scabbard from his sword-belt ; while a third a minute afterwards, penetrated his buff coat, inflicting a slight wound beneath the shoulder. But he



still continued his career, and was presently beyond the reach of the muskets. Then turning round, he shook his gloved hand in defiance, and, plunging into the wood, disappeared from sight.

## CHAPTER VII.

## IN THE GREENWOOD.



MORE than three weeks had elapsed since Walters's escape from the castle, and the siege had as yet made but little progress. As soon as the batteries were completed, a fire had been opened and maintained for several days, until a breach had been effected in the southern wall, by which it was thought a successful assault might be made. Accordingly, a detachment of Walters's own regiment, supported by two companies of volunteers, had made the attempt ; but, after an hour of severe conflict, they were compelled to retire with heavy loss, having on their side inflicted but little damage on the besieged. The officer who had led the attack laid the blame of his ill success on the mistake made, as he contended, in selecting the southern side as the point of attack. If the castle had been assaulted on the east, the soldiers might

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have been sheltered from the guns of the garrison until they had almost reached the outer wall; instead of which they had been exposed to a galling fire, and their numbers so greatly thinned that they were unable to follow up the advantage, which they had for the moment obtained. How far this mishap might be due to Hubert's discovery of the fact that Cicely's apartment was situated on the eastern side of the castle, must be left to the reader's conjecture. But there appeared nothing to justify, in the eyes of the army, the palpable mistake which had been made; and when, on the following morning, Colonel Walters, instead of selecting a new point of assault, ordered trenches to be opened, with the intention of approaching the castle by sap instead of storm, nothing but the awe in which they stood of their leader's determined character, prevented them from breaking out into open remonstrance.

Matters did not improve as the siege went on. Several of the cannon had burst; and those that remained uninjured were so few, that the besieged were able nightly to repair the damage, which the earthworks had sustained during the day. It became necessary to send for more guns, of a heavier calibre, and until the arrival of these—

which, for various reasons, were delayed nearly a fortnight—the siege operations were virtually suspended. The delay provoked still further the discontent of the soldiers. It was growing late in the autumn, and the nights were chill and dark. They murmured among themselves at being detained, week after week, before a place which ought, as they declared, long since to have fallen into their hands. Their indignation reached its height, shortly afterwards, when the garrison made a sortie one moonless night, and succeeded in destroying great quantities of military stores, as well as spiking the few guns which still continued serviceable.

But Walters continued wholly unmoved,—unaware, indeed, to all outward appearance, of the dissatisfaction of his men. He did not appear either surprised or discouraged at the ill-success of his manœuvres; but issued his orders as composedly, as though all had been going well with the siege. The only thing that appeared to arouse either vexation or anger in him, was the failure of Rumbold to discover the hiding-place of the Lydfords. He had been now more than three weeks on their track, and as yet no clue had been discovered. Rumbold himself was greatly disturbed



at his failure, and of late had absented himself as much as possible from the camp, exhibiting, when he was compelled to appear, a hang-dog aspect, which assorted strangely with his tall martial figure and masculine features.

Meanwhile Miles Lydford and his son continued to occupy the hut in the forest, expecting every day the arrival of Cuthbert Lang or Gregory Oakford ; the former to render what aid he could to his uncle, the latter to fetch away his horse. Hugh did not venture to move beyond the screen of the ilxes, or even to climb a tree, for fear of being seen by the various parties which were scouring the wood in every direction in search of the fugitive prince, whom they supposed to be concealed there. From the door of the cottage he could distinctly hear their shouts as they galloped by ; and once they approached so near, that but for one or two thick shrubs, which interposed between them and the southern wall of their place of retreat, it must inevitably have been discovered. On another occasion his ear caught, though at a great distance, the baying of a bloodhound, and he shuddered as he thought what might be the consequence, if it should approach the part of the forest in which the hut stood.

They now also began to suffer from want of food. Had it not been for the supply of bread, so fortunately left by Green on the night before their arrival, they must long ago have surrendered themselves prisoners, or perished by hunger; for Miles, in his weakened state, could not have eaten the salted meats, and if a fire had been lighted to cook any of the raw vegetables, the smoke would have at once betrayed them. Luckily the cottage was warm and air-tight, and though the nights were inclement, the days were bright and dry. Hugh fretted over the want of medical attendance more than anything else; but it may be doubted whether this was really a disadvantage. Dame Nature was left for once to her own resources, and she took good care of her patient, as if to prove what she could do, under such unusual circumstances.

By the end of the third week, Lydford was so far recovered as to be able to sit up in his chair, and even take a few turns up and down the room, leaning on his son's arm. But the day after this satisfactory result had been obtained the last supplies of food were exhausted. Hugh had pinched himself for several days past, living upon a few crab-apples which grew on a tree,

planted doubtless by old Halkett, and some roots dug up from the patch of cultivated ground, in order that his father might have the little that still remained of the bread.

But now the last fragment of sustenance had disappeared, and the old man was still too weak to be moved, even if any means of escape could be discovered. It became evident that Hugh must now, at whatever risk, quit the cottage.

"It is strange what can have befallen them all," said the latter, for the fiftieth time, after settling his father comfortably in the old Puritan's elbow-chair. "As for Cuthbert, I am half afraid that he must have been taken prisoner. But surely Oakford and Green cannot have been forbidden all this time to enter the forest. I feel sure that they would not fail us, and yet it is most unaccountable."

"It avails not conjecturing," said Lydford. "Conjectures are neither beef nor ale; nor even bread and water, for the matter of that. And we shall lack even the latter articles, I expect—or, at all events, the bread; for, as I think, the last crumbs of the loaf vanished at breakfast this morning."

"There is but one thing to be done," said Hugh,

"I must try to make my way through the forest to Clidesford. Most of our friends of course will have taken shelter with Sir William. But we shall find acquaintances there, at all events, who will hardly betray me, or suffer you to perish for lack of a little food."

"Humph," said old Lydford, "I scarce feel so sure of that. Of whom do you mean to ask help?"

"Well, there is Francis Garland, the minister's son——"

"He is a Roundhead," broke in Miles. "I will have no aid asked of him."

"Nay, my father," said Hugh. "He is scarce a Roundhead. He wishes well, I have heard, to the king's cause, and would gladly see him restored to his throne."

"Body of me!" returned the elder. "Why doth he not take his part, like a man, then? I know the lad well enow. It was he who, last autumn, came a-dangling after Cicely, until I cut his wooing short with a round word or two. If he is the king's friend, why does he sit at home when the king most needs his help?"

"Nay; but his father——" urged Hugh.

"Tut, tut!" said the Cavalier, impatiently, for

his recent illness had not improved his natural irritability. "Tell me not of his father. Doth not the Bible say, 'Honour the king' as well as 'Honour thy father;' and wherefore is he to obey the one precept to the breach of the other? Ay, and I know that that same father of his forbade him to dance attendance, as he strove to do, upon Cicely. Yet the springald paid little heed to what his father said in that business—ay, or what *her* father said either, if I had not hinted at something more than words, if he persisted."

"For the matter of that," said Hugh, with a smile, "I have heard my mother say that you yourself, in your young days, did not altogether heed the commands of my grandfather, when he forbade you to court her for your wife; and that you told him, in terms which were of the plainest, that you would have her, whether he willed it or not."


"I will break the head of thee," said the old man with a chuckle, "if you presume to reason with me. Go to, lad! If your mother came of an ill stock, I did a good deed in grafting her on an ancient and honourable tree, and making a loyal lady and churchwoman out of a Roundhead and a Puritan. It is clean otherwise in Cicely's case.

But all this helps nothing in the matter of our provender. If no other resource is left us than that of asking our neighbours at Clidesford to befriend us, I suppose we must e'en try that. And it were well for you to set forth at once; for a man recovering from sickness has the appetite of two."

"I have been considering whether I had not better travel by night," returned his son. "Parties are still engaged in exploring every part of the forest. It was but yesterday that I heard the cry of a bloodhound, though at a great distance. If I am seen, they will be sure to seize and detain me, whatever else they may do. And then, father, what will become of you?"

"What will become of us both, if we have to pass another day without food? No, you had better depart at once; and then, if you are fortunate, you may return ere midnight. Come the worst to the worst, if they do catch you, you can tell them where I am to be found, and they won't refuse me the fire of a platoon, which will be more comfortable than dying here like a rat in an empty trap. Farewell, my boy; be wary and bold; and commend me to your mother and Cicely, if you find them."

Hugh knelt down, after the fashion of those times, while the old man, laying his hand on his head, gave him his blessing. He then left the cottage, and, climbing a tall tree which stood at a few yards distance, cast his eyes anxiously in every direction round him. At the same moment a human figure came in sight, approaching the belt of shrubs by which the cottage was surrounded. He was an elderly man, mounted on a horse almost as old as himself; and the heavy pack-saddle, with which the latter was loaded, argued the rider to be a pedlar, or a carrier, perhaps, intrusted with merchandise. As he came nearer, Hugh could distinguish his dress more clearly. It was that commonly worn by the Puritan party, and the heavy sword of the day was girded by a belt to his side. At the distance of two hundred yards or so lay a small pool, connected, doubtless, with a spring which rose beside the cottage door; and, as the horseman approached it, he turned his steed towards it with the action of one familiar to the spot. Almost immediately afterwards two men, who from their attire were probably disbanded soldiers, rushed from a neighbouring thicket and seized the horse by the bridle. The pedlar drew his sword with more agility than



might have been expected, striking with all his force at one of his assailants, and inflicting a wound which compelled him to quit his hold. But the other robber had in the meanwhile stabbed him in the shoulder; and the horse at the same instant rearing and plunging, the rider fell heavily to the ground. Hugh saw that assistance would be of no avail unless immediately rendered. Hurrying down from the tree, and drawing the petronel from his belt, he ran with all the speed he could exert to the spot. The shrubs and underwood concealed the group from his sight until he came close to the spot where the contest was still proceeding. The old man had regained his feet, notwithstanding his wound, and was defending himself with extraordinary skill against his second antagonist; while the first, who, it was now evident, had received a mortal wound, lay stretched on the ground in the agonies of death. But the traveller was obviously growing weaker, and in a minute or two more he must have been pierced by the sword of his adversary, had not Hugh discharged his weapon at the latter, with so successful an aim that the ball passed through his heart. The stranger was delivered from the immediate danger which had threatened him; but he was severely



injured, and quite unable to resume his journey. Hugh was unwilling to postpone his visit to Clidesford, or disclose the secret of the cottage to a stranger. But the claims of humanity were paramount, and he proceeded at once to render him what assistance he could. With great difficulty the wounded man was lifted to the saddle, and Hugh, taking the horse's rein, led him to the secret entrance through the shrubs, observing the same precaution as on previous occasions. Arrived at the door of the hut, the old man was lifted from the saddle, and laid on Hugh's bed, where he fainted almost immediately afterwards from loss of blood. Hugh, however, had by this time acquired sufficient knowledge of surgery in the course of attendance on his father to dress the wounds, and arrest the flow of blood. He was presently relieved of his anxiety by seeing his patient open his eyes, and swallow a draught of water.

Leaving his father to watch the sick man, young Lydford now hastened forth to remove all traces of what had occurred; aware, as he was, that the discovery of the bodies of the robbers would most probably lead to a more close examination of the vicinity of the spot. Taking a spade which he

had found amongst the furniture of the cottage, he dug a shallow grave in the midst of the brushwood, in which he laid the two corpses, and trod the earth as level as possible over them. He then smoothed down the trampled turf, and washed away the stains of blood. This done, he returned to the cottage, and proceeded to examine the heavy pack-saddle with which the horse was loaded. To his great surprise, no less than satisfaction, he discovered that the contents consisted almost wholly of provisions. Loaves of bread, small casks of flour, cheeses, preserved meats, and fruits of various kinds, together with some flasks of cordial, made up the entire load—if we except a few books and articles of wearing apparel, the latter chiefly belonging to the female sex. As Hugh turned over this collection, it suddenly occurred to him that the new arrival must be the person of whom he had heard Gregory Oakford speak, as having been the builder and former occupant of the cottage. He now remembered that the forester had said something about a sudden departure, no one knew whither, and the grandchild whom the old man had talked of bringing back to live with him. He also called to mind that the horse had turned down the con-

cealed path without resistance, and, as it seemed, almost of its own accord. There could be little doubt that the stranger was Ezekiel Halkett himself, and Hugh had no sooner made the discovery than he hastened to impart it to his father.

"Like enow," said Lydford, when he had heard his son's report. "He has been tossing restlessly, and calling repeatedly after Ruth, and inquiring why she does not come to him. She is doubtless the grandchild of whom you speak. Well, Hugh, we must do a Christian deed, and remain here to nurse him, Puritan though he be. Sooth to say, I like the cut of his face, more than is my wont in the instance of such cattle."

"He is a stout old fellow," said Hugh, "that is certain, whether he be Puritan or not, as you would have said if you had seen him do battle with the villains. Well, we must first get his clothes off, and supply him with cooling drink, must we not? After that he will perhaps fall asleep."

"Ay, lad, to be sure; and cooling drink—that is to say, cold water—we have in abundance, which is so far fortunate. But we have nought else, which is by no means so. You must be off again to Clidesford, Hugh, as soon as you have got him to bed. There is one stomach more to feed now,

and mine is already as rank a rebel, at this moment, as if it had sworn the Covenant."

"There is happily no necessity," said Hugh. "Halkett—if that be indeed his name—has brought a large supply of victuals with him. We need have no fears on that head for the future."


"Ha! say you so?" said the old Cavalier. "Nay, then, let us fall to at once, and make the most of our good fortune. Sooth to say, I have not felt so hungry since the night before Round-way-down, when our company had to pass the night fasting, because the crop-eared knaves had cut off our baggage waggons, and there was not a hen-roost for miles round, that had not been stripped as empty as a Scotchman's purse. Ha! good provender, I protest," he continued, as Hugh loaded the table with some of the contents of Halkett's pack-saddle. "Pass me the wine-flask, my lad, and we will crush a comfortable cup to King Charles; and Heaven give him his own again, with all convenient speed."

Good food and wine, of which the old man was prudent enough not to take too large a share, soon completed his restoration to health. By the end of another fortnight, he declared himself able to don his buff coat and steel cap again, and strike a

down-right blow for his Majesty, whenever occasion should serve.

But Hugh's other patient did not progress so satisfactorily. The fever indeed soon subsided, and the wounds, which proved less severe than had been supposed, gradually healed. But there was no return of strength. Day after day the sick man lay on his couch, dozing or wrapt in meditation, which he rarely broke even by the utterance of a word. At times his eye rested on Lydford and his son, as though he were watching their demeanour towards each other with unusual interest. Hugh's thoughtful attendance on his father, and the cheerful patience with which he endured the occasional sallies of temper, into which the latter was betrayed, seemed more particularly to attract his attention. Once or twice he was apparently on the point of making some remark on the subject; but, if so, he changed his purpose and remained silent.

At last, one warm October day, he broke his silence. The elder Lydford, who for the last week past had complained of being mewed up in the house while the sun was shining bright overhead, was sitting out of doors on a rustic seat. Hugh, who had been engaged in removing the fragments



of the morning meal, was on the point of leaving the cottage to join his father, when he was stopped by old Halkett's voice, who requested him to come and sit down by his bedside, as he had a communication of importance to make to him. Hugh complied, his curiosity a good deal excited.

"You are a good lad, Hugh Lydford," began the sick man. "I have watched you carefully, and feel that I can trust you. I suppose I must have done so, whatever might have been the opinion I had formed of you. But it is a great satisfaction to feel that you are brave and true."

He paused, but Hugh made no reply; and presently Halkett proceeded—

"I am severely injured—more so than you think. The wounds I have received are not dangerous in themselves; but my health has long been failing, and I feel I shall never recover the shock I have sustained. I may live a week or two, possibly a month; but that will be the utmost limit of my life. Of course I shall not be able to quit this cottage without help. Were I myself alone concerned, I should be well contented to remain and die here—in the home which for so many years I preferred to any other. But there is another and a dearer life depending on me, which

must be cared for. I cannot accomplish what I wish without your help—without communicating to you the particulars of my past history. But before I do go, I want you to promise me, Hugh Lydford, that you will render me what kindly offices you may, as you hope yourself to receive them at your utmost need."

Hugh listened with surprise and interest. There was nothing in either the stranger's tone or language, of the peculiarities of the party to which, in common with the rest of his family, he bore so great a dislike. His whole demeanour seemed to argue a breeding, as well as a station in life equal, if not superior, to his own. He readily gave him the desired assurance; and the wounded man, after again pausing to rally his strength, commenced as follows:—

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE OLD MAN'S TALE.



It is not necessary that you should know my real name. It is, however, one which has long been renowned in the annals of England; and in my own county ever commands the utmost respect. Though mine is but a younger branch of our ancient house, my fortune was ample; and few gallants might have shone with more distinction in the train of Elizabeth, than myself, had I been so minded. But I never loved courts or courtiers. I married young, and resided on my ancestral estate for twenty happy years; rarely visiting the capital, until my only child had quitted the University. I was then persuaded by Buckingham, the princely favourite, who was distantly allied to our family, to accept for Geoffrey an appointment in the Royal Household. It was against my better mind; for I knew that the habits of the



court were extravagant and dissipated, beyond all previous example; and that among the spend-thrifts and libertines of the day, Buckingham himself was the most notorious. I yielded, after many refusals, to Geoffrey's importunity; and by that fatal compliance, destroyed the happiness of my life for ever.

For a year or two indeed, nothing occurred which appeared to justify my apprehensions, Geoffrey's demands for money, though frequent were not inordinate, considering the situation in which he was placed; and the rumours which from time to time reached me of his indulgence in the excesses of the day, did not impute any serious criminality to him. But early in the year 1621, I received a visit at my country seat, from one of my earliest friends, to whom I had commended my son on his departure to London. I found presently that he had come for the purpose of warning me of what, in truth, could not long have been kept secret. Geoffrey had, it appeared, for a long time past, been plunging deeper and deeper into debauchery; consorting with gamblers and profligates of the lowest stamp. It was even said that he had within the last few months, married a woman of the vilest cha-

racter. It was this last rumour which had induced Sir Stephen Fosbroke to hasten down to my country house, and impart to my ear what it would have been a breach of our long friendship any longer to withhold. Though my wife was suffering from severe illness, I did not delay an hour in hurrying up to London. I found that the worst part of the rumour was false. Geoffrey *was* married—had been married more than a twelve-month—to a person greatly his inferior in birth and fortune, but withal as true and pure a gentlewoman as my heart could have desired. She told me she had wedded him in entire ignorance of his real rank and circumstances; and since her marriage had laboured hard to reclaim him from the vicious habits into which unhappily he had lapsed. Nor did she doubt that she would have succeeded had it not been for the baneful influence of one of his companions, an old college friend—a man of coarse habits and appearance, but endued with abilities which gave him a powerful hold over minds weaker than his own. He it was who had first induced him to resort to the gaming-table, whither he himself repaired to redeem, if possible, his own broken fortunes: and his companionship still retained so strong a hold upon Geoffrey as to

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prevail over his better resolutions. It was but the day before that he had solemnly sworn that he would never touch cards or dice again. To avoid the recurrence of temptation, he had further promised that he would take the step she had so often urged upon him, of returning to his father's house and acknowledging his marriage, which the approaching birth of his child rendered doubly imperative. Preparations for their departure had even been commenced, when they were broken off by a visit from the tempter, who had prevailed upon her husband to accompany him to the Ordinary, to try if one fortunate stroke would not redeem all past mishaps. He had gone out late on the previous evening. It wanted now scarce two hours of noon, yet he had not returned. I did what I could to comfort my newly-discovered daughter, assuring her that I would willingly forgive her husband's past offences. We would at once leave London together: nor did I doubt that change of scene and associations, together with the influence we could jointly bring to bear upon him, would undo the mischief that had been wrought.

While I was still engaged in my efforts to soothe her, there came a sudden and violent knock

at the door ; and a man, too impatient to wait for an answer to his summons, burst into the house. Even at that moment, notwithstanding my surprise and alarm, the singularity of his appearance struck me. He was a large-made ungainly-looking youth, with coarse features and an awkward gait. His clothes were of good materials, and such as betokened a gentleman, but put on in a careless and slovenly fashion, arguing a total disregard of outward appearance. His voice, too, when at length he spoke—for several minutes elapsed before he could bring himself to utter a word—was unusually harsh. Yet, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, there was a something in the expression of his face, and in the piercing glance he threw round him, which impressed and even fascinated me. Instead of inquiring angrily, as I should otherwise have done, the meaning of so rude an intrusion on a lady's privacy, I stood silent, awaiting his explanation.

"Come with me, Mistress Alice," he exclaimed at last, controlling his agitation by a strong effort. "Your husband prays your immediate presence."

"My husband !" she exclaimed eagerly. "Wherefore has he not returned ? Has ought happened to detain him ?"

"He is badly hurt," said the other. "It may be to death. Come, I pray you, lose not a moment. I have promised to bring you with all the speed that may be possible."

Alice hurried from the room to don her walking attire, and the new-comer, as if relieved by the momentary respite, flung himself into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. I seized the moment of Alice's absence to make inquiries, upon which I could not venture when she was present.

"Is Geoffrey's life indeed in danger," I said; "and what has befallen him? Tell me quickly, I pray you, before my daughter-in-law returns. It may be well to keep the worst from her; but I would rather know it at once."

"Geoffrey! Daughter-in-law!" exclaimed the youth, looking up in surprise, which for a moment mastered his emotion. "Are you then indeed——"

"I am his father," I replied sternly. "I know not who or what you are; but if you are the person I suspect—the companion of whom my daughter-in-law has told me, whose evil influence——"

"I am," he exclaimed in a tone of the bitterest self-reproach. "I know not what she may have

told you : but it is I who have been your son's tempter—who have worked his ruin. Yet, as I hope at the last to meet with mercy, I never dreamed of this ! ”

“ Of what ? ” I repeated, though in a less peremptory tone ; for despite my anxiety, and anger at the sight of my boy's betrayer, I could not help feeling touched at the remorse by which he was agitated. “ Tell me, I pray you, as the best reparation you can now render, the truth without disguise.”

“ I prevailed on him to accompany me last night,” he replied, “ to the Ordinary, at which high play generally takes place. At first we only ventured small sums ; and for several hours the tide of success ran favourably for us both. Towards morning the greed of gain, I suppose, grew upon us, and we risked what we had won, together with all that our purses contained, in heavier ventures. Our luck now proved different. Geoffrey was successful in almost every stake which he laid down, while I was speedily stripped of every farthing. We left the house together some two or three hours ago, and he would have returned hither, but that I—I was friendless and penniless, and the large sum he had won tempted me——”

"You stabbed and plundered him?" I exclaimed, leaping up and drawing my sword.

"No, sir," he retorted haughtily, roused for a moment from his depression. "What I did might be as bad; but it was not that. I induced him to repair with me to a tavern for refreshment, and there challenged him to a fresh encounter with cards, in the hope of replenishing my purse from his winnings. He refused again and again; but at length my taunts stung him into compliance. I know not how it was—I suppose the devil was determined to pay me for the service I had done him, in tempting my friend to his ruin—but I won game after game, until even I wished to desist. Geoffrey now however demanded, each time more vehemently, that the play should be resumed, until every coin of the large sum which he had won was transferred to me. Even then he would not stop, but insisted on staking the whole of his patrimony against the sum which I had just received from him. In that trial, also, he proved the loser." My informant paused.

"Go on," I cried impatiently. "Alice will return in an instant."

"As soon as the last card had been played," he resumed, "Geoffrey rose so quietly that his

manner altogether deceived me. He placed in my hands the acknowledgment of the sum he had lost, and then stepped aside into the adjoining room. The next moment I heard the report of a pistol." He once more broke off, unable to proceed.

Between horror and grief I too was silent. I dared not ask whether the wound was mortal ; but I recalled the youth's words on entering, " He is badly hurt, it *may be* to death ;" and they gave me some hope.

Alice now entered the room, cloaked and hooded. She seized my arm, and we hurried out together.

We passed through a number of narrow and filthy streets, until we reached the banks of the river, and entered the precincts, which are still infamous, I am told, as they were then—the haunts of the vilest characters in the metropolis.

Here, at the door of an obscure tavern, we found a lot of ruffianly-looking men, whom the report of the dreadful tragedy that had just been perpetrated had drawn to the spot. On their callous faces I could read no tidings of my son's condition ; but I gathered, as they made way for me to pass, that the surgeon was with him.

We pressed forward and entered the room. A single glance was enough to determine all.

Geoffrey lay on a rude couch, his left side swathed with bandages, which were dripping with blood. The ball had not touched the heart, they told me, but an artery had been injured; and the unskilful hands which had first essayed the task had been unable to staunch the wound.

The old man himself here interrupted his narrative, overpowered by emotion. Hugh handed him a draught of wine, and after a few minutes he again proceeded.

I need not dilate on the scene which followed, the recollection of which agonizes me even now. Geoffrey was free from pain, and fully conscious of his state. He earnestly besought my pardon, for having kept his marriage secret, as well as for all his other misdeeds, and entreated my protection for his wife. He assured me that he had no intention of taking his own life, until just before the fatal act, when a sudden madness seized him.

Then the poor lad, kind-hearted to the last, turned to his companion, who was leaning against the wall with his face wrapped in his cloak. Taking his hand, he spoke a few words of forgiveness, to which the other made no response. Soon afterwards he expired. Alice was with

difficulty separated from her husband's corpse, and conveyed in a fainting state upstairs.

The unhappy youth and myself remained alone in the chamber of death. Neither of us spoke; but presently I noticed something white, which was compressed tight in the left hand of the dead man—a paper, or parchment, apparently of some kind.

Thinking it might contain some memorandum or expression of his dying wishes, which he had not been able to bring himself to utter aloud, I unlocked the cold fingers and took it from him. It was a playing card, the six of clubs—the last, as I afterwards learned, which he had played, or rather was about to play, when the game was finally determined against him. Unconsciously he had retained it in his grasp. It was deeply stained with his blood; the white marks of the thumb and finger ends being clearly traced against the red, which had overspread the rest.

As my companion's eye lighted on this ghastly token, the last remains of his firmness gave way. He fell on his knees before me, and implored my forgiveness, in language which the agony of his mind rendered fearfully eloquent. He knew nothing of my rank or circumstances—for on these



subjects it appeared that Geoffrey had always preserved a strict silence. Supposing, therefore, that my daughter-in-law's bereavement would be further aggravated by penury, he implored me to take back the money which he had won, flinging at the same time the paper which he had received from my son into the fire. He assured me, with earnestness, that he would thenceforth be an altered man ; would forsake his evil ways and lead a life of repentance. Only let him be permitted to make the sole atonement in his power.

I could not retain any bitterness of anger against him ; but I felt it impossible to grant his request.

"Rise," I said, "unhappy boy ; let it satisfy you that Geoffrey's widow will not suffer from want, as you suppose. She and her unborn child will be amply provided for. Bestow this money in alms, or what you will ; and may Heaven give you grace to persevere in your resolution of amendment. As for this melancholy token, I will keep it for your sake. Should I hear that at any time you have relapsed into your former errors, the sight of it may awaken your conscience, and bring you to repentance. You will scarce, I deem, be likely to forget it."

"Never," he replied with fervour. "Never while I live! Do not I owe you a life? Claim it when you will! And now farewell, for I must pain you no further with my presence."

He rose and quitted the room, nor have we ever met from that day to this, though what I have related occurred full thirty years ago. But enough of him. I recur to the more immediate subjects of my tale. A few hours after her husband's death, Alice gave birth to a girl; but the shock she had sustained was too great for her to endure in her weakened state, and she died a few hours afterwards. I took the infant home with me, and for eighteen years, until she grew up to womanhood, little Ruth was the solitary comfort and companion of my wife and myself. We lived in strict seclusion.

Our great sorrow in the first instance forbade us to mix again in the world, and when that had been abated by time, habit had rendered retirement necessary to us. I see now that it was not wise; but at the time I had no suspicion that I was acting otherwise than rightly. Ruth grew up a lively, spirited girl—the very image of her mother, one of the loveliest women I have ever seen. I must hurry over this

part of my story, for I cannot bear to dwell upon it.

When Ruth was in her nineteenth year my wife died, and my house became more lonely than ever. In vain did friends and relatives urge me to let Ruth enter society under their protection. I remembered my unwise compliance in the instance of Geoffrey, and returned an equally unwise refusal to all their propositions.

In the following summer information was brought me, that a young man, well dressed, and of a handsome appearance, had been seen hanging about the woods which surrounded my residence. It was currently rumoured that my grand-daughter was the magnet which drew him thither. Instead of making careful inquiry as to who and what the youth might be, I summoned Ruth to my presence, and abruptly questioned her on the subject. She said nought in reply, terrified I doubt not at my angry words ; but her deep blushes convinced me, only too surely, that report had for once spoken the truth. I sternly forbade her to cross the threshold again, unless accompanied by myself or one of my confidential servants.

Then going forth to the place of rendezvous, where, as I had learnt, she met her lover, I com-

manded him yet more peremptorily to quit the pleasance, and to enter it no more. In vain he reasoned and entreated and threatened ; I would listen to nothing. I doubt not, they both thought me cold-hearted as well as unjust ; but the former I was not. It was the deep affection which I entertained for Ruth, from whom I could not bear to be parted, which rendered me deaf to all other pleading. They both obeyed my commands—so at least I supposed. But a few weeks afterwards she fled with her lover, and for four years all my efforts to trace the place of her retreat were vain.

Left wholly alone, I grew more stern and melancholy than ever. I am now persuaded that my reason must have been partially impaired, even before the last fatal shock it sustained. But that came with a suddenness which might have unhinged any mind.

It is now about seven years ago that my household was startled in the middle of the night by the arrival of a messenger who demanded to see me without a moment's delay. My servants would have returned a refusal ; but I conjectured in a moment the meaning of this summons, and gave orders for his admittance. He was a trooper of Prince Rupert's regiment, which had been defeated

three days before at Marston Moor, and driven back on York. The captain of his company, Sir Gerard Ashby, had been mortally wounded in the action, and expired the next day at his lodging. His widow—my Ruth, as I had divined ere the tale had been half told—lay dying of a broken heart, and only prayed that she might linger long enough to commit her child, a girl of two years old, to my protection. I set forth instantly, but arrived too late to receive her pardon, or bestow mine in return.

This last blow was too heavy for me to bear, and my reason gave way under it. The face of man became odious to me. I left my property in charge of my steward, telling him it was my purpose to live abroad, until the troubles of England had come to a close. Taking little Ruth Ashby with me, I set forth, attended by only one servant, whom I discharged at Dover. But I had no real intention of leaving England.

No sooner was I free from the espionage of my servant, as I considered it, than I altered my course. I assumed, for more effectual disguise, the dress of the Puritan party, and journeyed into the West of England, seeking a place as far remote as possible from my own neighbourhood. After

long search, I pitched on this spot, and with my own hands built a hut in the heart of the wild forest, for her and for me, surrounding it with evergreen shrubs, which, in the course of seven years, have rendered its seclusion almost impenetrable.

Two months ago the supply of money which I had brought with me, large as it was, and carefully as it had been husbanded, was exhausted. I was obliged to return again to my native place, and obtain a sum sufficient to meet my future needs. Having deposited this with a jeweller at Pershore, and again assumed my disguise, I was returning to the cottage, to make preparations for the reception of my great grandchild, when the encounter with the robbers befell me, and my rescue by your hand. I think the loss of blood, or it may be the approach of death, which I am assured is not far distant, must have dispelled the sick fancies under which I so long laboured.

My earnest desire now is to see my orphan Ruth once more, and commit her to the charge of some one who will protect and cherish her. There are none of whom I can ask this but yourself, Hugh. Your family, as I have heard you frequently say, are about to leave England, as soon as a favourable

opportunity for doing so presents itself. Have pity on my forlorn and friendless girl, and entreat your mother to adopt her as her own, until she reaches her eighteenth year, at which age I shall take the necessary steps for her being then acknowledged the heiress of my estates. I shall also make ample provision for her education and maintenance. But in order to accomplish this I must return to Pershore, which I cannot do without your aid. Hugh Lydford, will you befriend my orphan Ruth, and so soothe the last anxieties of a long-suffering and solitary man?

Hugh leaned over the old man, and grasped the wasted hand extended to him.

"I will," he said, solemnly. "So far as in me lies, Ruth Ashby shall never want a friend."

## CHAPTER IX.

## AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.



IT was now the sixth week of the siege. The new cannon, which had arrived from London about a week previously, had opened their fire with such effect that the breach was already pronounced practicable ; and, as the trenches were advanced almost to the outer wall of the moat, the assault might be looked for at any moment. Captains Saxby and Travers were standing near one of the batteries, watching the effect of the balls as they crashed among the ruins of the barbican, occasionally bringing down some fresh piece of masonry.

"Walters has issued his orders respecting the assault—so I have just learnt," observed Travers. "It is to be made at daybreak, and he—that is, the Colonel—purposes to lead it in person."

"In person!" exclaimed Saxby, in surprise ; "what may be his motive in so doing?"



"It is not easy to say. He may be anxious to set himself right with the men, who are sorely dissatisfied with him at present. But I rather fancy that he wishes to make sure that some Malignant, who has taken refuge in the castle, does not escape him. Sometimes I have fancied that he supposes some person of rank—Buckingham, or Wilmot, or Charles himself to be harboured there."

"Ha! Charles himself!" cried Saxby. "On what does he build that notion?"

"Nay, I know not that he does actually believe it. But he could scarce be more anxious, in any case, to prevent the escape of any of the inmates than he is. And, after all, the notion is not so very improbable. It is now six weeks since Worcester fight. It is certain that Charles has not escaped beyond the seas, and no man knows where he has lain hid. Such a place, methinks, as this nest of prelatists and traitors is no unlikely one for him to choose. That too would explain the obstinate defence which has been made."

"True," said Saxby. "And that may also account for the Colonel's anxiety respecting these Lydfords. He may in some way connect their

escape with that of Charles Stuart. To my thought, he has been more urgent about their capture than about the progress of the siege itself."

"You are right in that," observed Travers. "When the news of young Lydford's apprehension arrived, I chanced to be present. Anxious as Walters ever is to conceal his feelings, he could not disguise the extreme satisfaction it gave him."

"How?" exclaimed Saxby. "Young Lydford a prisoner! How and when did that befall?"

"It occurred yesterday evening," said Travers. "Peterson and Rumbold, with one or two men, had been sent on some errand by the Colonel to Pershore, and a mile or two from the town they encountered the lad, who was just on the point of entering the forest. Peterson recognized him in a moment——"

"Yea; he bears a bitter grudge against him," observed Saxby, "such as, to my thought, scarce befits one who professes so godly a walk as this Job Peterson. But go on."

"The lad immediately set spurs to his horse, and led them such a chase, that it was half an hour before they seized him. If his horse

had not been tired, and their horses comparatively fresh, he would have baffled them after all."

"But they secured him at last?" said Saxby.

"Yea, and with strong cords," returned Travers. "Peterson had him strapped to one of the troopers, besides binding his hands behind him. He keeps watch over him now, I am told, as though his secure custody were a matter of life and death to us all."

"He has warrant for that, I doubt not," observed the other. "The Colonel has issued his private instructions to Peterson, be sure. And of a surety there goes the lad to his quarters now. He is about to undergo an examination; and it will be a severe one, or I greatly err."

"You are right," said Travers. "If he should prove obstinate, Walters will not hesitate to try some sharp measures with him; though if his Excellency the Lord General should chance to hear of it, the Colonel may be called to account for it. He has more than once declared that he will not suffer prisoners to be examined by torture. But there is little likelihood of that, after all. The Lord General is fully occupied with matters of graver importance than this boy's

injuries. I am advised that there is threatening of risings in Norfolk, and Hampshire, and Kent. The coasts of Devon and Cornwall too are menaced by Grenville, who still upholds the cause of the tyrant in the Scilly Isles."

"I nothing doubt it," returned Saxby. "Small wonder is it that the men of this world love not the rule of the Saints; and the order which is now, as I learn, being taken by our governors for the enforcement of godly discipline must needs be galling to those who live according to the flesh."

"Ay," said Travers; "I have been told that a Bill has been brought into the Commons, forbidding the women, under severe penalties, to paint their faces, or wear patches, or bedizen themselves after the immodest fashion of these times. But I know not whether the report be true."

"Nay, it is true," said Saxby; "and he by whom it has been introduced is a great and worthy instrument. Surely the painted Jezebels and Herodias of the Man's court were a grievous scandal to a Christian land. Doubtless they who uphold these things, and the like of them, are strong—yea, even as the strong man!—yet the Lord General——"

"Will prove a stronger than he. I am well

persuaded of it," interposed Travers, cutting short this style of conversation, for which he had but little fancy. "Few hands in England are stronger than Cromwell's, even now; and they will be stronger yet, or I much mistake. I trow he will make root and branch work with the rebels. But I must not remain longer here. I bid you good morrow, Saxby." He turned away as he spoke, leaving the other still engaged in watching the effect of the artillery upon the breaches.

Meanwhile a scene had been proceeding in Colonel Walters's quarters which more than justified the predictions of the two officers. Walters had summoned some of the officers of his regiment most devoted to his service to assist him in the examination of Hugh Lydford, who stood charged with having aided in the escape of a notorious and convicted traitor, and refusing to disclose the place of his concealment.

The proceedings were regularly conducted, Walters being conscious that the whole might be brought under the cognizance of his superiors. In the first instance, Peterson and Hinchcliffe were examined. They swore to having seen Miles Lydford, with whose person they were well acquainted, helped into a boat and ferried over the

river by the prisoner, although they commanded him, in the name of the law, to desist. Further, they affirmed that the elder Lydford was severely wounded at the time, and could not have evaded their pursuit but for the help so afforded him. They added that, to the best of their belief, he was now concealed in the wood, and that the youth was about to rejoin him when he was captured.

Hugh himself was then questioned. He frankly admitted having helped his father to escape. Neither did he deny, when pressed on the subject, that he was acquainted with the place of his retreat. But when required to disclose this, or to say in what direction his father had journeyed ; or whence he himself had come, and whither he was going when seized by Peterson and Hinchcliffe—he remained impenetrably silent. Not a word of any kind could be extracted from him. At length, finding himself baffled in every attempt he made to entrap his prisoner, Walters resolved to adopt sterner measures.

The practice of examination by torture has never been acknowledged by the law of England, notwithstanding that for many centuries it was resorted to, without scruple or limitation—the very

judges who had declared it to be illegal frequently ordering it to be employed. The anomaly arose from the fact that it was regarded as a part of the Royal prerogative, and might therefore be ordered for the king's service, apart altogether from the law of the land, by those to whom he deputed his authority.

Partly because of this circumstance, and partly from a more enlightened policy, Cromwell, it was well known, had refused to use it himself or sanction its use by others. But the practice was nevertheless too common to attract notice, unless in the instance of some sufferer of high rank, or under some exceptional circumstances. Walters's eagerness, therefore, to discover the old Cavalier's lurking-place, and to discover it before Cicely Lydford fell into his hands, being so great, he resolved to run even the possible risk of forfeiting Cromwell's favour in the hope of gaining the information.

"Hugh Lydford," he said, "the Court will take a merciful view of your case. You are young, and have been not unnaturally led astray by regard for your father. But the service of the State imperatively requires that the proscribed rebels who are now hiding themselves from justice, should be

discovered and dealt with according to law. We are willing, therefore, wholly to overlook the past, and set you forthwith at liberty, conditionally on your declaring the place where Miles Lydford is now concealed, and your assertion being verified by his apprehension. What think you of this offer?"

"As of a base and traitorous one," answered Hugh, with flashing eye, for he could no longer restrain his indignation. "Are you a Christian man, that you propose to a son to betray to death his own father?"

"You take it amiss," replied Walters. "Your father will not be delivered over to death, unless by the sentence of a court, by which he will be fully and fairly tried. You must needs know, young as you are, that the law cannot suffer the ties of blood to be made the plea for screening notorious offenders from the penalty of their misdeeds."

"Offenders! misdeeds!" reiterated Hugh, whose passion was fully roused. "You may account it as an offence for a man to do loyal service to his king and country; but I and mine esteem it otherwise. Were it the meanest hind that fought on the king's side after whom you were seeking,



I would shame to betray his hiding-place to you."

"You are malapert, young sir," said Walters, "and this tone will benefit you but little. You forget, it would seem, that you are here charged with an offence to which a heavy penalty attaches, and that you have admitted that you are guilty of it. If you wish to escape the consequences of your transgression, it will not be by bluster and defiance."

"I care not what the consequences may be," retorted Hugh. "I will not give you the information you ask for."

"They may be more severe than you are prepared for," observed his questioner.

He spoke a few words apart with Peterson, who left the room for a moment, and then returned with a stout piece of whiplash about four feet long. He then, with Saunders's assistance—in whose stalwart grasp Hugh, in spite of his struggles, was as powerless as a child—secured the prisoner by several cords to a stout wooden pillar which stood as a support to the roof, in the centre of the room. Saunders then tied the whiplash tight round the lad's temples, and, inserting the handle of his sheathed dagger under the knot,

twisted it round several times until it was drawn tight.

"Now, Hugh Lydford," resumed the President of the Court-martial, "I repeat that I do not seek your injury. You have but to answer truly to my questions, and you will be at once released. If you continue obstinate, the blame is wholly your own. Where is Miles Lydford now concealed?"

Hugh compressed his lips firmly, but made no answer; and Walters making a sign to Saunders, the latter wrenched the handle of his dagger round with the full strength of his sinewy arm, inflicting the most acute pain, as was evidenced by the red flush which overspread the boy's features, followed immediately afterwards by a deadly paleness.

"Where is Miles Lydford concealed?" repeated Walters, in the same tone as before.

Hugh was still silent, and a second and then a third twist was given to the tourniquet. A scream of agony burst from the sufferer at the third compression, and the blood, starting from the lacerated skin, streamed down his face.

The President was about to repeat his question for the fourth time, unmoved alike by the lad's gallantry and sufferings; but Rumbold interposed.

"The cord will snap if any further strain be laid

upon it," he said. "If you are resolved to overcome this springald's obstinacy, see what a slow match lighted between his fingers will do. I have seen that tried many a time in the Western Main, when the Dons would not tell where they had hidden their ingots. But I never knew it fail, sooner or later, to unloose their tongues."

Walters glanced round the room, and, reading no disapprobation in the faces of his colleagues, gave a nod of assent. Rumbold immediately withdrew the tourniquet, fastening the fingers of Hugh's right hand in such a manner as to lash them tightly together. Next he selected from his pouch one of the matches used in those days by musqueteers, and thrust it forcibly between the fingers. Then directing Saunders to assist him in holding the lad's arm in an upright position, from which he could not withdraw it, he took a burning stick from the fire and ignited it. There was a pause of a minute or so before the match had burnt down far enough to come into contact with the prisoner's flesh.

The poor lad, whose nerves were already unstrung by the agony they had sustained, could scarce restrain himself from shrieking aloud for mercy as he saw the flame burn lower and lower,

and the first sensation of heat began to be exchanged for sharp, stinging pain. In another minute it would have grown to intolerable agony, had not Hinchcliffe at this juncture hurriedly entered the room, and, drawing his commanding officer aside, prayed to be permitted to speak a few words in his ear.

Walters stepped aside into the passage. "What means this intrusion, Hinchcliffe?" he exclaimed, angrily; for he was vexed at being interrupted at the moment when he was persuaded that Hugh's resistance was on the point of giving way.

"A new-comer has just arrived in the camp, and he is desirous of speaking with your honour," said the soldier.

"A new-comer? Did I not give you strict orders, when I placed you at the door, to admit no one until this inquiry was over?"

"You did," returned Hinchcliffe. "Pardon me if I have offended; but I thought you would scarce like this visitor to enter unannounced."

"And who, in the Fiend's name, is the visitor?" exclaimed the Roundhead, more angry than before.

"His Excellency the Lord General," said Hinchcliffe, briefly.

"The Lord General? General Cromwell?" exclaimed Walters, greatly startled. "You dream, Hinchcliffe. You have made some wild mistake."

"Be sure I have not," was the reply. "He is unattended, and plainly dressed, with a heavy cloak wrapt round him, as one who would avoid notice. But I served under him once, and they who have done so are little likely to forget him."

"And where is he now?"

"In yonder room," said Hinchcliffe, pointing to the opposite door. "He bade me tell you that he awaited you there."

Walters stood for a few moments wrapped in thought. He knew his patron too well to doubt that there was some motive, alike for the visit itself and the secrecy with which it was made. But what could this motive be?

Was it possible that Cromwell was angry at the length of time to which the siege had been protracted, and had come to supersede him in the command? His despatches gave him no reason to suspect this. Or, had he perchance heard of his attachment to Cicely Lydford, and had come to remonstrate with him for seeking a bride among his avowed enemies? Tush! Cromwell would never allow so trifling a matter to engage his

thoughts! Yet these were the only explanations which suggested themselves to him.

After a few minutes more of reflection, he remembered that to show any reluctance in obeying the General's summons would be the course most likely of all to heighten any suspicion he might have conceived. He must go to him immediately; but he was sensible that his thanks were due to Hinchcliffe, and that it would be politic as well as just to bestow them.

"I thank you, Hinchcliffe," he said; "you have done well. His Excellency plainly wishes this visit to be kept secret; and we must of course be careful that no hint of it escapes either of us. Here are five broad pieces: they will be ten this day month, if strict secrecy has been preserved. As for this lad, direct Peterson to remove him to his quarters; and then, hark you, leave his prison-door unlocked, and himself unshackled."

"Unshackled!" exclaimed Hinchcliffe, surprised. "Would you have him escape?"

"From prison, ay; but not from your watchful eyes. It would be useless to persist further in endeavouring to extort his secret. But as soon as he is released, and thinks he has evaded our notice, he will, without fail, return to his father.

Do thou and Ruinbold therefore keep on his track, yet wholly unsuspected by him. If, by your means, Lydford should be seized, count it as twice what you have already received." He passed on as he spoke, and entered the opposite chamber.

General Cromwell was standing in the embrasure of a window at the further end of the apartment, his eyes fixed on the turrets of the castle, on the summit of which the Royal standard still waved, though sorely rent and tattered. Walters saw in a moment that he had been right in supposing that the visit was designed to be a secret one. The General wore the dress of a civilian of middle rank; and a heavy riding cloak, folded round the upper part of his person, almost concealed his features from sight. He looked what, in fact, for many years of his life he had been, and what his enemies were never tired of taunting him with being—a well-to-do farmer or grazier, who had never busied his brain with battles or sieges, cabals and conspiracies. He turned somewhat hastily round as the door opened, and, perceiving that Walters was alone, dropped the cloak, and came forward to greet him.

"I greet thee, Hubert Walters. Ah, thou art

surprised to see me, and, as I think, somewhat troubled. Yet, wherefore? True, I come unannounced and without attendance. But the face of a friend is ever welcome: yea, all the more so if it be unlooked for. Are not stolen waters sweet, and is not bread eaten in secret pleasant?"

"Your Excellency misjudges me if you think your presence can be otherwise than welcome," replied Walters. "Yet, I own, I thought that the grave matters whereon your thoughts at the present juncture are bestowed, would have left you small leisure for a friendly visit to one so humble as I am."

"You say well," returned Cromwell. "The position whereunto we have attained—or, rather, into which others have thrust us; for I profess that it has been none of my seeking—is one which allows little room for the interchange of friendly offices wherein men in a private station may lawfully take delight. Were it only possible—" he sighed, and looked upwards as he spoke; "but it is not," he added, hastily, "and it were but waste of time to speak of it."

"I must presume, then, that it is some affair of State which brings your Excellency here."

"It is even so, Hubert. We will sit down here



awhile, and do thou make fast the door while I unfold it. Thou knowest that, notwithstanding all we have done for this ungrateful people, they, who would fain be its rulers, are clamorous that we, who by our own arm have wrought the deliverance of the land, should now lay aside our sword and busy ourselves henceforth about our own private affairs alone—even as the farmer's cattle, when they have brought home the harvest, are straightway divested of their harness, and turned once more into the fields."

"Such treatment may befit beasts of burden, who are the mere instruments of their owner's pleasure; but, offered to men of understanding and spirit, it were but insult and outrage," observed Hubert.

"Truly, you are in the right," said Cromwell. "Yet were these men indeed fit to hold rule in Israel, and would mine own retirement to my vine and fig-tree restore peace to this distracted land, I had not hesitated to lay down my staff of command to-morrow. But, alack, such a step, far from healing the breaches of our Zion, would but occasion twofold havoc and ruin."

"Of that no man can doubt," said his companion. "The strife of parties can only be quelled by sub-

mission to the authority of some one man ; and, in broad England, there is but one man to whom all will submit."

"Thou art a true friend," said Oliver. "Mark me, Hubert Walters. You have followed me these eight years past ; and I am well satisfied that, whatever may be your creed and practice, you are at least faithful to me. You have capacity, too, and resolution ; and do not affect the language under which many would fain disguise their real sentiments. Is it not so, Hubert Walters ?"

"Your Excellency's penetration has not deceived you. I followed your fortunes in the first instance because I foresaw that one day you would be Master of England, and the favour you have shown me has bound me inalienably to your service."

"It is well," said the General. "I have work for you to do which will win yet greater favour. Know that I have received tidings from sure sources that, not in one spot only, but throughout England, malcontents are organizing an outbreak with the intention of demanding that the army be forthwith disbanded, and the rule of the Parliament made absolute. I have despatched agents whom I can trust into Lancashire and Wales, into

Hampshire and into Kent. But the chief point of danger, I am advised, is Norfolk. Thither you must repair, and with such a force as will, if rightly handled, be sufficient to repress all outbreak, or, at least, stamp out the flame before mischief has been done."

"You may command my poor services to the death," said Walters. "Yet I would ask permission to delay my departure until yonder castle shall have fallen. The assault is to be made to-morrow at daybreak, nor do I doubt that it will succeed. It is not that I would reap the glory where I have borne the burden; but rumour has been busy with my name, ascribing to me cowardice, incompetency, treachery—I know not what. It would scarce, methinks, be well for me to assume a post of high command, until mine honour has been vindicated."

"Ah, I have heard somewhat of it," said Cromwell, smiling. "They fancy, do they not, that the Young Man, Charles Stuart, lies sheltered behind these walls, and you would fain connive at his deliverance? Alas! that calumny will soon refute itself. I have received sure advice that he escaped two days ago in a sailing vessel from the Sussex coast. But there is wisdom in what you say. If the


castle is so near its fall, it were better that you remained and completed your work."

"I thank you with all my heart," said Walters ;  
"I ask but for one day's delay. The next morning I will set forth for Norfolk."

"Be it so, then," said Cromwell. "I must now return to Pershore, where I shall remain, I expect, another day, as the messengers I have despatched into Devonshire will hardly return before to-morrow night. Perhaps you may be able to accompany me on my return to London."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE ASSAULT.

HE cold grey dawn of an October morning was struggling feebly with the surrounding darkness, when the troops, which had moved up half an hour previously through the trenches, received orders to prepare for an immediate assault. The quarter selected for attack was the barbican of the castle, or rather what had once been the barbican, for the fire of the besiegers had now reduced it to ruins. It lay at a short distance only from the nearest point of the trenches, and its remains afforded some shelter to the storming force. Objects had not yet become distinctly visible when the cannon from the redoubts opened upon the breach, to destroy the defences which had been thrown up during the night.


After a few discharges, a fortunate shot struck the counterpoise of the drawbridge, which fell with

a loud crash and could not again be raised. Instantly the thunder of the artillery ceased, the signal was given, and the Puritan soldiers, leaping over the parapet of the trenches, rushed impetuously to the assault.

But they were met with a valour and a determination equal to their own. The garrison consisted of Cavaliers of good birth and breeding, and of veterans long tried in warfare and devoted to the cause they upheld. The most complete preparations had also been made for the defence.

No sooner had the assailants quitted their temporary cover, and advanced upon the drawbridge, than from battlement and crenel and loophole a hundred experienced marksmen opened their fire upon them. The bridge was soon choked with dead and wounded, through the midst of whom fresh combatants forced their way, succeeding at last in reaching the arch beyond, which was closed up by a massive door.

Against this the engineers endeavoured to fix their petards, though every one who in succession attempted it was struck down by the murderous discharges. It was impossible even for the Ironsides long to endure a carnage like this. After a quarter of an hour of sharp fighting, the rem-



nant of the assailing party was compelled to fall back without having obtained the smallest advantage.

"Well fought, my hearts! Thanks, Leslie, Fielding, Hewett. Thanks, Winthrop, Percy. Thanks all. The knaves have gained little but broken heads this bout. Yet they fought lustily."

"Ay," said Percy, "to give Satan his due, these villains are scarcely to be matched for hardihood. I protest I was half ashamed to knock over so many of them. Good wot! they were like hydra heads. No sooner was one down, than two sprang up in his place."

"Know you who it was that led them?" inquired Hewett. "He was a brave fellow whoever he was."

"I half fancied it was Walters himself," observed Winthrop, "though that, I suppose, could hardly have been."

"Ay, but it was, though," said Cuthbert Lang. "It was Walters sure enough; and he escaped without a wound, so far as I could judge."

"If so, that was no fault of his," said Warington. "I must even do him the justice to say that. But they are about to recommence the attack. Is it not so, Percy?"

"So I judge," said the Cavalier addressed ; "but the smoke makes it difficult to discern their movements. Ha ! they are passing up ladders. They mean to attempt to scale the walls, then."

"Ay, ay, to distract our attention from the main point of attack," said Warington. "I marvel they did not essay that before."

As he spoke, the war-cry of the besiegers was again raised, and the castle was assaulted at the same moment by a dozen different bands. Scaling-ladders were planted in every direction against the outer wall of the moat, from the topmost rounds of which some of the assailants fired incessantly upon the garrison ; while others attempted to form bridges of poles tied together, by which they might cross to the battlements.

The slaughter was now as great as, or even greater than, it had been during the previous encounter ; but in this instance it was more evenly divided, the defenders being almost as much exposed as their adversaries. The latter did not succeed in effecting a lodgment anywhere. But the result at which they had chiefly aimed—the withdrawal of the greater part of the garrison from the central point of attack—was fully attained, and the consequence soon became manifest. The engineers

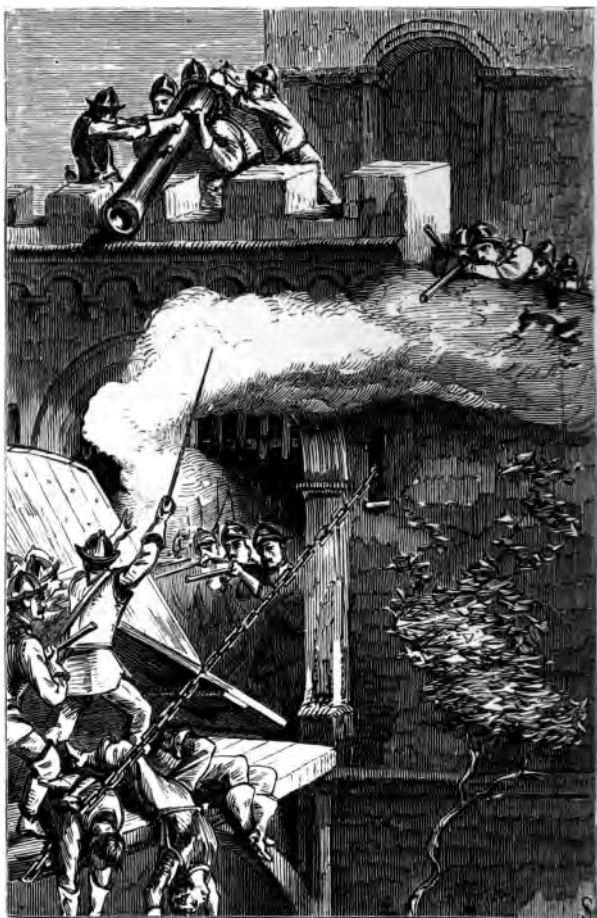


succeeded in fixing and discharging their petard, the explosion shattering into fragments the massive door, and leaving the entrance to the castle exposed to view.

Raising a shout of triumph, the Puritans rushed across the drawbridge, while the Cavaliers, rallying in a moment, met them in the space beneath the entrance tower, and a hand-to-hand combat commenced. Aware that if the enemy should succeed in forcing an entrance into the great hall, further resistance would be hopeless, the defenders fought with a desperation which for the time not only enabled them to keep at bay the superior numbers of their opponents, but even twice to drive them back to the entrance of the drawbridge. But the combat was too unequal to be long maintained. The resistance of the besieged must soon have been overpowered, if a successful manœuvre had not once more given them the advantage.

From the commencement of the second attack Cuthbert Lang had retained his station on the battlements, firing without intermission on the enemy, as they pressed forward over the drawbridge. He now noticed that the second repulse had so thronged the roadway that it actually bent under the weight. A thought suddenly struck






"Half a dozen stout fellows succeeded in launching the gun  
over the parapet."—P. 171.

him. Calling to his companions, he suggested to them that they should help him in raising one of the culverins which lay close at hand dismounted from its carriage, and hurl it over the battlements on the crowd beneath. The idea was instantly caught up.

"Bravo, my lad!" shouted long John Rufford. "The thought is worth a king's ransom. What ho, my boys, bear a hand, and we will have it over in a trice!"

Half a dozen stout fellows instantly hastened up, and plying their sinewy arms and shoulders, succeeded in rolling the cumbrous piece of ordnance up the gun-carriage, which still retained its former position, and launching it over the parapet. Down went the huge mass of iron, breaking the chains, and crashing through the woodwork of the drawbridge as though it had been pasteboard.

Several of the assailants were killed or disabled by its fall; others were precipitated into the water, and either drowned or slain by the musketry from the battlements; while the rest, who were still engaged in combat beneath the gateway, were cut down by their opponents or forced into the moat. A retreat was sounded to draw off the scaling parties, who were still engaged at arm's length with



the defenders of the battlements. Once more the garrison had succeeded in repelling the attack.

But their triumph this time had been dearly bought. A great many of the Royalists had been slain, and many more were wounded so severely as to prevent them from taking any further share in the defence. Percy had received a sword-thrust; Hewett and Drake were bleeding to death in the great hall of the castle ; Tracy, Winthrop, Langley, and some twenty others, lay dead or mortally hurt in the entrance of the gateway. Sir William himself, who was badly wounded, together with Markham, Leslie, and some ten or twelve more of the Cavaliers, met in the long gallery to consult together for the defence or surrender of the fortress.

"They are too many for us," said Warington, "and evidently resolved to carry the place at whatever sacrifice of life. For my own part I am well content to defend these old walls to the last, and find my grave among their ruins ; but I scarce like to involve ye, my gallant friends, in my destruction. Good sooth ! these Roundheads have long ere this settled that no more grace is to be shown to so hardened an offender as I am ; and were I to surrender, it would only be to receive the

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fire of a sergeant's company some ten minutes afterwards. But with you it may be otherwise. Perhaps this Walters, who is at least a valiant soldier, may be so far moved to mercy that he may spare your lives. If then it be your wish that ye offer to yield up the castle on such terms as shall be judged reasonable, speak but the word, and I will send forthwith a flag of truce."

"I speak but for myself," said Markham, "but I am against surrender on any terms. No post of vantage has yet been lost, and the enemy has suffered a loss which exceeds our own five-fold. My counsel is that we erect a barricade at the entrance of the hall, which they will find it almost impossible to force, even after they have succeeded in crossing the moat. It is already an hour or two past noon, and the day is dark and gloomy. There are not three more hours of daylight. I hold it most probable that they will not renew the attack until to-morrow morning; and if they do, I see not why we should not drive them back, as we have already twice done. If we can maintain ourselves till nightfall, we can make a sortie by the secret passage, as before, and cut our way through their lines."

"I am of your opinion," said Leslie. "They

have gained no real advantage yet, and the passage of the moat cannot be accomplished, as I think, except by a temporary bridge, which it would take them some hours to prepare. What say you, long John Rufford?" he continued, turning to the old trooper, who was resting his huge limbs against a pillar close by.

"I do not love surrendering to any," replied the person addressed, "and least of all to Roundheads. To my thought, Master Markham has given good counsel."

"And to mine also," said Sir William Warington. "Come, lads, let us fall to, and throw up this barricade. If it help us not to drive them off altogether, we shall at least sell our lives dearly."

A general shout of assent confirmed his words. Notwithstanding wounds and fatigue, they threw themselves energetically into the work, and a formidable breastwork was run up, composed of heavy articles of furniture and fragments of stone, which the cannon of the besiegers had brought down.

From the top of this it would be possible to make a successful stand after the entrance-passage had been forced. Behind, at the lowest point, and underneath, several barrels of powder were placed

and a mine laid, communicating with the great gallery; so that, in the event of the barricade being captured, the mine might be fired, and the remnant of the garrison retreat under cover of the explosion.

"It will cost them some tough fighting before they carry that," said Markham to Cuthbert Lang, as they threw themselves on the floor of the hall, to take rest after the completion of their labour.

"True," said Cuthbert, "but they are safe to carry it nevertheless. Master Markham, may I pray of you to render me a service, in requital of that which I was enabled to do for you?"

"A service, lad?" said Markham. "Surely, if it be in my power. But I trow there is small chance of my quitting this castle so as to be able to render service to any."

"It must be rendered in this castle," said Cuthbert, "or not at all. Look you. After the first encounter this morning, I judged that we could not ultimately succeed in holding the castle against the Roundheads, and I persuaded my Aunt Lydford and Cousin Cicely to take refuge in the room leading to the secret passage of which you wot. As soon as the barricade has been forced, I pray you to accompany me to the



chamber in question, the passage to which I have left open, and aid me in effecting their deliverance. Will you for charity's sake and the good cause do this?"

"My hand on it, I will," returned Markham; "that is, supposing always that I am left alive to do it. Nay, no thanks—or, rather, no thanks except what are due to you rather than to me. Is it not the only chance of escape for myself also? But hark! that is a signal from the battlements; they are about to attack us again. Pardy, these fellows, whatever other virtues they may lack, are no way wanting in bravery. I had not deemed it possible they would make a third assault to-day."

They hurried to the battlements, and there discovered that the Cavalier's conjectures were correct.

The reader is aware of Walters's reason for effecting the capture of the castle before sunset; and even if he had not been so influenced, he would probably have insisted on renewing the combat before the enemy had recovered from the fatigue.

Aware of the obstacles which the moat would offer, he had provided, some time before, large

stores of fascines, which the soldiers had been employed for the last hour or two in bringing up, and were now flinging into the water, sheltered by the remains of the barbican from the guns of the besieged. As the moat at this point was already almost choked by the fragments of the drawbridge, and stones dislodged from the battlements, together with the bodies of such of the assailants as had fallen in the last attack, their object was soon accomplished.

A path was once more opened to the castle gate, and the Ironsides for the third time advanced across it, undismayed by the disasters their comrades had experienced. A few minutes now sufficed to clear the entrance passage, and the barricade became the theatre of a deadly combat,—the Roundheads pressing up the broken ascent in dense numbers, which seemed continually to increase, while the garrison maintained an incessant fire, every shot of which told on their adversaries.

The carnage was frightful to behold, but no experienced eye could doubt what the result would be. Overpowered by numbers, such of the Cavaliers as still remained alive were driven from one point of vantage to another, until their

enemies had surmounted the last obstacle in their way. Pouring down a destructive fire in their turn from the heights they had won, they rushed down to complete their victory; and the battle was broken up into a series of single combats, in which quarter was neither asked nor given.

"Have at thee, dog!" shouted Sir William Warington, as his blade crossed that of Walters, in the entrance of the long gallery, whither the small knot of Cavaliers had been compelled to retreat.

"Down with the Arch Malignant!" responded the other, aiming a deadly pass, as he spoke, at his opponent's side, from which the blood was already streaming.

"Slay him! Slay the Philistine!" cried the gigantic Saunders, levelling a blow at Sir William's unguarded head, which must have been fatal had not John Rufford dexterously parried it.

The two instantly closed in single combat, for which they were well matched; while Peterson, who at that moment recognized Cuthbert Lang among the survivors, rushed forward, endeavouring to break his way through the crowd of combatants, and resolved to wreak the vengeance he had so long meditated.

Just at this instant Cuthbert, who had escaped from the *mêlée*, cast a rapid glance around him. The hall presented a fearful and sickening sight. The oaken floor was slippery with blood, and heaped with bodies, some writhing in agony, others frightfully mutilated or stark in death. The vaulted roof rang with shrieks of pain, intermingled with oaths and shouts of triumph; as man after man of the devoted garrison fell beneath the swords of the Ironsides.

His eye lit on Rufford and Saunders, who had shivered their weapons, and were rolling on the ground, locked in a deadly grapple. Close beside them, the duel between the leaders of the two parties was still proceeding, though it was evident that the strength of the Cavalier was fast failing.

Even as Cuthbert's glance rested on him, he gathered his strength for one last blow, which he discharged full on the helm of his antagonist, striking him senseless to the ground, and at the same moment falling beside him. Now was the moment for firing the train! He drew forth the pistol which he had reserved for the purpose, and was on the point of drawing the trigger, when Peterson seized him in his grasp. Cuthbert struggled with his powerful adversary, but in vain.

The Puritan grasped him firmly with one hand, and raised his sword with the other to pass it through his victim's body. Another moment and he would have accomplished his purpose ; but ere he could strike, the report of a petronel rang through the air, and Peterson dropped on the floor shot through the temples.

"Up, up, my lad!" shouted Markham in his ear. "If we are to escape, it must be this instant. Warington, Leslie, Fielding—all are slain! I only have escaped from the medley. I know not how!"

Cuthbert sprang to his feet, his senses restored by the imminence of the peril. Firing his pistol at the train, he flung the weapon in the face of a Roundhead who was advancing to attack him, and rushed with the speed of the wind after his companion. At the same moment a tremendous crash was heard. The stones and heavy lumber of which the barricade had been composed were lifted on high and flew in all directions through the hall, wounding or killing all with whom they came in contact. The massive walls rocked and split asunder, as if upheaved by an earthquake; and the open roof, dislodged by the concussion, fell in one huge ruin, burying beneath it the living and the dead.

Markham and Cuthbert hurrying through passages, now filled so densely with smoke as to render it difficult for them to find their way, reached the open trap, and closing it behind him, descended into the vault which led to the secret passage.

Here they found Dame Lydford and her daughter awaiting their arrival in an agony of alarm; the noise of the combat, and more particularly the explosion of the mine, having penetrated to the depth of the secret chamber, and filled them with apprehension lest all their friends should have perished. Reassured by Markham and Cuthbert, they made no attempt to leave the passage, until darkness had completely enveloped the castle. Then issuing cautiously forth, they made straight for the forest, and happily succeeded in escaping notice.

Meanwhile the Puritans had at length succeeded in subduing the flames, which had burst forth after the explosion of the mine, and proceeded to make a careful examination of the ruins. They found but few of either party alive, and those few for the most part mortally hurt. Hubert Walters was almost the only exception. He had been stunned, but not wounded, by the last effort of his

expiring antagonist; and when struck down, just before the final catastrophe, had rolled beneath the chimney of the hall, the massive masonry of which protected him from the falling timbers, by which so many had been crushed. He revived on being carried out into the open air, and was found to have received no serious injury. His reappearance was greeted with shouts of applause by the admiring soldiers, whose favour he had by his daring courage entirely regained. They accompanied him with acclamations to his quarters in Clidesford, whither he was obliged to repair forthwith for refreshment and repose.

Saturnine as his temper was, he could not but be elated by the renown he had achieved, and the brilliant prospects which were now opened to him. But it may be doubted whether the tidings with which Hinchcliffe and Rumbold met him at the door of his apartment did not afford him even greater satisfaction.

"Most noble general," said Rumbold, "if your poor followers may presume to address you by the title which report says is about to be conferred upon you, we are the bearers of good tidings. We have the old malignant, Miles Lydford, safe in our hands at last!"

"How, a prisoner?" exclaimed Walters eagerly. "Are his wife and daughter and the rest in custody also?"

"We know nought of the women," said Hinchcliffe, "nor of the young imp Cuthbert Lang either. Rumour says no trace of any of them has been found in the Castle."

"But we have the old traitor," repeated Rumbold. "The scheme your wisdom devised proved entirely successful."

"Ha," said Walters, "let me hear how. Did the boy repair straightway to his father?"

"Not straightway," said Rumbold. "He went first to a house in Pershore, whereat, we learn, a stranger lodges, respecting whom inquiry should be made. There he stayed till nightfall, and then stole forth, unperceived as he thought, into the forest. We tracked him cautiously at a safe distance, and after two or three hours' journey found ourselves close to a cottage, so cunningly hidden in the greenwood, that we might have searched till doomsday, yet never found it."

"And there you apprehended Lydford?" said Walters. "Where is he now lodged? I trust in some place of security."

"In the Debtors' Prison at Pershore," said




Hinchcliffe. "It is the strongest place I know of about here. He is handcuffed, and a sentinel mounted over him besides."

"It is well," said Walters. "You shall not lack your reward. The warrant for his death has long been signed. Mount, Hinchcliffe, and ride with it into Pershore. Warn Lydford that he stand prepared to die at daybreak."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE TOKEN.

T wanted two hours or so of midnight, when the door of the house in which Walters's quarters were situated was opened by Rumbold, and a woman closely veiled and muffled issued from it. The trooper looked curiously after her as she stepped forth into the moonlight. Notwithstanding her wrappings, her figure seemed to be light and elastic; and the speed with which she moved, argued that she must be young. But his scrutiny was soon cut short by a summons from his officer.

"Mount your horse and ride instantly into Pershore," said the latter. "I am not satisfied with the arrangements for the safe custody of the Lydfords."

"The prison in which they are lodged," said Rumbold, "is as strong a place as your heart could desire. The walls are three feet thick, the

windows closely barred with iron, and the doors solid oak. Besides this, the prisoners are secured with handcuffs, a sentinel placed at the door, and another at the outer gate. Your honour may be easy ; it is impossible they can escape."

"It may be," said Walters, "but I feel uneasy, nevertheless. Young Cuthbert Lang, it would seem, is at large ; and we have reason to believe that there is a large number of Malignants lurking in the neighbourhood. They may attempt a rescue."

"They will scarce venture on that, in a town where General Cromwell himself is known to be present with a considerable force," urged the other. "His quarters are hardly a hundred yards distant from the prison. And bethink you, General, it wants scarce eight hours to daybreak ; and then there will be no further need for his safe custody !"

"The warrant for his death is safely lodged with the Provost Marshal ?" inquired Walters.

"Hinchcliffe delivered it into his own hands three hours ago," was the reply.

"It is well," said the General. "Yet nevertheless, good Rumbold, repair without delay to Pershore, and mount guard on the Lydfords yourself. I know not why, but I feel a presentiment that some

stratagem will be attempted for their deliverance. If my preparations were completed, I would myself undertake the task ; but that cannot be, and I must therefore entrust the matter to you. Mount guard yourself, remember—*inside* their chamber ;—and withdraw not your eye from them for one moment until my arrival, which will take place an hour before daybreak. Admit no one to their presence—no one whomsoever, except the wife and daughter of the prisoner. It were shame to exclude them. But if they enter, they must not be permitted to depart. Now, begone with all speed. I grudge every moment that you linger here.”

“ Yes, proud damsel,” he soliloquized, as Rumbold quitted the room, “ your pride and obstinacy shall yet give way, for all that has been said and done. Wait till you hear the bugle sound for your father’s execution ! All will be as child’s play until that moment. If you continue still obdurate when you hear that, you must be made of different stuff from all others of your sex.”

Meanwhile Cicely passed with a rapid step down the road which led to Clidesford, until she reached the corner of a narrow lane shaded by trees on either side. Here she paused, and taking

up a stone, flung it with a loud splash into a pond by the roadside. Presently the sound of horses' feet was heard, and two horsemen well armed, leading a palfrey equipped for a lady, made their appearance from a thicket near at hand. Almost at the same moment, a trooper in whom Cicely recognized Walters's attendant, came riding at a rapid pace along the road, passing them fortunately without notice.

"How have you sped, Cicely?" asked the shorter of the two riders. "Did your intercession avail aught in my uncle's behalf? Is yonder a messenger charged with an order to stay the execution?"

"Alas! no," returned the maiden. "My prayers availed no more than they would have done had they been addressed to the steel casque he wears. He would not be moved to delay the sentence—no, not for one short hour, unless—but speak no further of him. I would forget the very sound of his name."

"Ay, it is even as I expected," said Cuthbert. "There is no hope, then, save in what this strange old man—this Ezekiel Halkett, if that be his name—may yet do for us."

"And that will be little enough, I expect," said

the taller horseman. "A half-crazed fanatic, and, as I judged, almost at his last gasp—a person whom no one knows, not even Oakford himself, for all that he seems bewitched with him! I marvel that you can attribute sense or purpose to his fancies."

"Nay, but you forget, Master Markham, what this Halkett has already done in our behalf. He has secured the means of escape for us—how, I know not; but his influence must be great, or the bribe he has paid, a heavy one. A vessel is even now lying in the estuary of the Severn to convey us from England whither we will. My Aunt Lydford and his little girl will soon be aboard, if they are not already. He has also supplied us with horses, without which flight would have been impossible. Nay, it was he who sent Oakford to conduct us to his lodging this afternoon, and but for his help we could hardly have made our escape from the castle good. Methinks when he has done so much, we may well trust him to perform all he promises, difficult of accomplishment though it may seem."

"You are right, Cuthbert," said Cicely, "and besides, it is our only hope. The drowning man catches at the frailest spar: and he does well, for

though it may support him but for a few moments, yet help may come before he sinks. Do not let us have to reproach ourselves hereafter with having neglected aught which might have by possibility availed."

"Be it so, fair mistress," said Markham; "we will repair to Master Halkett's lodging without loss of time. But remember this is not your only hope. I would earnestly counsel you to seek an interview with General Cromwell himself, and plead for your father's life. By an unexpected chance he rests to night in Pershore."

"With General Cromwell—with the Regicide himself!" exclaimed Cicely, starting at the idea.

"With the Regicide himself," repeated Markham. "True, it were a more satisfactory interview, if one could meet him alone in the depth of the greenwood, with no business but that of Andrea Ferrara to be discussed between the parties. But you have not the chance of that; and besides, it would scarce suit you even if you had. Nevertheless the weapons you can bring to bear are by many accounted more trenchant than broad-sword or rapier; and were I you, I would at least try their edge before I gave up the matter."

"You say well," said Cicely. "In such a cause

it were sin to hesitate. Let us not lose a moment in making the attempt."

They spurred their horses to a gallop, and were soon lost in the distance.

Meanwhile Cromwell had returned to Pershore, and found that letters of importance had arrived, which occupied him the whole of the following day. The return of his messengers late in the afternoon left him no space for repose, and scarcely time for necessary refreshment. Midnight had almost arrived, and he was still deeply engaged in writing, when his servant, Coleman, informed him that a person was without, who earnestly sought an immediate interview with him; but if his Excellency's business was not yet concluded, the visitor would gladly await his leisure.

"It is late to receive visitors," said Cromwell. "Who and what is the applicant?"

"It is a female, veiled and muffled," said Coleman. "She seems to be in great distress, but steadfastly refuses to disclose her name, or the purpose which has brought her hither."

"Some woman who has suffered loss or outrage at the hands of the soldiers," said Cromwell. "Surely we will see her forthwith; nor be like



those persons set in high places, who do right only to such as weary them by their importunity. Let her enter, Coleman."

The servant accordingly left the room, and returned almost immediately, introducing the applicant. Cromwell scrutinized her with a keen glance; and finding that she made no effort to commence the conversation, inquired who she was, and what was her motive in seeking him.

"I am a poor maiden, who would make an appeal to—to your generosity," replied poor Cicely, her earnestness in her father's cause getting the better of the dislike, amounting almost to abhorrence, with which she regarded the rebel chief. "I am a soldier's daughter, and it is to a soldier that I plead in my father's behalf. I have heard also that you, Master Cromwell—that is, I mean—" she paused abruptly, fearful of having offended her hearer, by withholding the title of honour by which he was now uniformly accosted, yet scarcely able to prevail upon herself to utter it, even in her present strait.

Cromwell saw her embarrassment and hastened to relieve it.

"Trouble not yourself with that, maiden," he said. "To my thought it signifies but little by

what titles we earthworms address one another, so only that we bestow not upon them those which are His alone to Whom all honour is due. But proceed to tell me who is your father, and what is his present trouble."

"His name is Miles Lydford," replied Cicely. "He has been taken prisoner by Hubert Walters, who has ordered him to be put to death to-morrow at daybreak, unless——"

"Miles Lydford, said you?" interposed Cromwell. "That name seems familiar to me, yet I know not where I heard it. Was he one of those who took part in the defence of Clidesford to-day, and was his sentence pronounced by judgment of a court-martial?"

"No; so please you. He was sorely wounded at Worcester fight, and has scarce recovered from his hurt. He has had no trial by court-martial or otherwise, that I have heard of."

"That may scarcely be," said the Republican General. "But I will make further inquiry." He summoned Coleman, and writing a few words on a slip of paper, desired him to carry it to his private secretary, and return with the answer as speedily as possible. Meanwhile he motioned to his visitor to seat herself on one of the chairs that were

scattered about the room, and resumed his writing. Cicely obeyed with a beating heart. Notwithstanding the agony of her anxiety, heightened as it was by the slight gleam of hope which she fancied she could now discern, she yet felt at first interested, and afterwards engrossed, by the presence of the great and victorious soldier, whom she now beheld for the first time. The features were harsh and rugged, as she had always heard them represented; the figure utterly wanting alike in the outlines and the proportions which are thought to constitute dignity of aspect among men. Yet she felt as though she could sooner have bade defiance to the most powerful sovereign, surrounded by guards and courtiers, than to the plainly-dressed and plebeian-looking man, who was seated, without parade and attendance, before her. She watched the expression of his eye, as he continued to peruse the documents before him, every now and then noting some memorandum of their contents, or throwing them on one side as of no importance; and the conviction grew every moment more strongly upon her, that Walters himself would prove less accessible to her tears and entreaties than he, if he should once resolve on the rejection of her suit.

After a delay, which was, in truth, scarcely more than a quarter of an hour, but which to her fancy seemed to be protracted to three times that interval, Coleman returned with a paper, on which a few lines only apparently were written. Cromwell read them deliberately through, and then without a moment's hesitation again addressed her.

"It grieves me, young lady, but your suit is vain. Your father has been tried and condemned by the highest tribunal of the realm many months ago. He is one of those, I find, on whom the Parliament were induced, at my special intercession, to bestow a free pardon, notwithstanding that he had borne arms throughout the whole of the late strife against the people of this land. I was assured that he would henceforth submit himself to the lawful authority, by which the country is now governed——"

"Alas!" interrupted Cicely, "if such a pledge was given in his name, he knew it not."

"You talk idly," said Cromwell, bending his brow into a harsher frown than it had worn before. "Was your father a child, that he could think the liberties of England might be imperilled, and her soil drenched in blood, yet no security

be exacted of those who had wrought the evil, that at least they would forbear from it for the future? ”

“My father loves England as a loyal Englishman should,” exclaimed the damsel. “Nor does he deplore the evils whereof you speak less than do you yourself.”

“It may be,” rejoined her companion ; “but no less has he caused them. The folly cannot excuse the woe it has occasioned.”

“Folly!” she repeated, the blood mounting to her forehead as she spoke. “Do you call the stainless loyalty of six hundred years by no better name than folly? Have you forgotten, too, that you and he will one day stand before the same Tribunal? Are you so well assured that your own plea will satisfy the Judge, that you speak so slightly of his?”

“I judge no man’s motives,” said Cromwell, with solemnity, “and but hope for pardon as a guilty man myself. Before the Judge you speak of, may your father also be forgiven. But that avails nothing in the present matter. The Lord, who hath raised me to this rule among men, did not intrust the sword of the magistrate to my hand that I should bear it in vain. Surely the blood of

the Saints, which has been poured out as water on so many battle-fields, demands that justice be done, and that the hands of offenders be restrained."

"Spare him, then, this time," cried Cicely, "and he will offend no more. Nay, he will leave England——"

"Ay, to return in the train of Charles Stuart, so soon as he shall have gathered strength sufficient for a fresh attempt. Deny it not. Your father would but boast, were he to be charged with such treachery, that he had kept no faith towards those with whom he accounts it treason to keep it. Yet I would not be harsh with you," he added, as he marked the deadly paleness which now overspread her countenance. "Nor think, maiden, that I do not feel for your sorrow. I have a daughter nearly of your years, and it is even thus that she would have pleaded for me, had the fate of war been different!"

"Oh that she were here, to add her prayers to mine," sobbed Cicely, whose self-command had now wholly given way.

"Nay, do not wish it," said Cromwell. "It would have availed you nothing. Urge it no further," he continued, as he saw that the unhappy

girl, who had exhausted alike argument and entreaty, was about to fling herself at his feet, in the agony of her supplication. "See you not that all is vain? Coleman, conduct her hence, and bear in mind that I admit no one else to-night."

His eye followed the retiring figure of the maiden as, leaning on Coleman's arm, she was supported from the room. "She has something of Elizabeth's pleading look," he muttered to himself; "and the voice is not unlike hers. And she must be fatherless before the sun shall have risen to-morrow. Surely we have fallen on evil times; and posterity will judge us but hardly. Yet it may not be helped, and I will think of it no more."

By a strong effort, of which men of his stamp alone are capable, he resumed his work, and was soon, to all appearance, as deeply absorbed as before in the perusal of the despatches.

Half an hour might have passed when the door was again opened and Coleman presented himself. The General looked up sternly from his writing.

"How now, Coleman? Did I not tell you I must not again be interrupted?"

"I crave your Excellency's pardon," said the man,

with evident embarrassment; "but there is one at the door to whom I know not how to refuse admission."

"How, you saucy knave!" exclaimed Cromwell angrily. "Are not my orders a sufficient warrant?"

"He said they would not avail to prevent his entrance."

"*He* said! Who is this visitor that seems to have bereft you of your senses? Some petitioner, doubtless, like the last, and on the same bootless errand. Go to, Coleman; you must learn your duty better, or you serve me no more. Be he who he may, I will see no man to-night."

"My Lord General," said Coleman, whose blanched cheek and trembling lips were evidence that he was influenced by no pretended terror, "I hardly think that he is a being of this earth at all. In any case he will not long be so."

A sudden thrill shot through Cromwell as he heard the reply. It is well known that at all periods of his life the great Puritan was liable to those mysterious emotions which the world calls superstitious fancies; and these seemed to gain a stronger hold upon him as life advanced. But there were withal few calmer or more resolute



spirits than his, and he was sensible of the folly of giving way to such a belief on the present occasion. He answered Coleman, therefore, with the utmost composure.

"You are dreaming, sirrah, or have suffered some impostor to beguile you of your reason. Retire, and command this intruder that he straightway leave the house. If he still refuse, summon the guard to expel him. What now? Do you still linger?"

"My Lord," persisted Coleman, "I once more entreat your pardon. But the man has delivered to me a token, which he insists will insure his immediate admission. I pray you at least to examine it before you command me to refuse him entrance."

As he spoke he produced a small packet, secured by a massive seal, and laid it on the table. Struck once more by the man's demeanour, Cromwell repressed his first impulse, which was to throw the packet on one side, and to repeat the order he had given. He took up the paper, and hastily broke the seal. The inclosure was no letter, as he had expected. It was a card—a playing-card as it seemed, for a few black spots were still visible upon it, though time, and the

stains of some dark liquid had almost obliterated them. Near the middle two patches of the original white still remained, bearing to any one who curiously examined it a rude resemblance to a human thumb and fingers. Coleman as he anxiously watched the General's face, saw it turn suddenly as white as the paper which had just dropped from his hand. The next moment he bent forward to the table, with a low groan, as though convulsed by a sudden spasm of pain, and hid his features with his hands.

Awe-stricken by a display of agitation so unusual, Coleman stood silent for several minutes, until Cromwell, again raising his head, swollen with contending emotions, said in a broken and scarcely audible voice, "Bid him enter, and alone."

Coleman retired without a word. The next minute the door was thrown open, and a tall haggard figure in the last stage of emaciation, with what seemed to be the dew of death already on his forehead, moved feebly forward to the chair in which the Republican General still sat, silent and motionless as an image carved in stone.

"Geoffrey Neville," exclaimed Cromwell, at length, as he gazed intently into the face before

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him. "Is it thou, indeed? Have we met again?"

"It is even so," replied the old man. "We have met at last. Remember that thou owest me a life!"

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE FLIGHT.



THE prison to which the Lydfords had been consigned presented a favourable contrast to the miserable dens of which John Bunyan and others of his day have given so deplorable a description. It was cold, bare, and gloomy, to be sure ; the windows high and narrow ; nor was there a fireplace in any of the cells,—doubtless because the chimney might have offered a possible avenue of escape. But the room was tolerably lofty and clean, as well as furnished with an oaken table, and a sufficient number of chairs for the accommodation of its inmates. On one of the latter Miles Lydford was seated, with his daughter at his side ; the flame from the single lamp with which the room was provided falling on his grey beard and bluff English features. Hugh was seated opposite, handcuffed, as was also his father, and looking

paler and thinner than when we last encountered him. Apparently the whole party had been engaged in prayer, and had only just risen from their knees.

"There," said old Miles, as he reverently laid aside the book he had been using; "that at least is well. The goodly talk of Mother Church is comfortable at an hour like this. So my Royal Master found it, and so do I, his humble liegeman. Do what they will," he continued—with a glance at Rumbold, who agreeably to Walters's directions was standing close by—"do what they will, our enemies cannot deprive us of that. They have driven our pastors into foreign lands, or starved them at home; they have destroyed our churches, or opened them to the wolves which prey on the sheep; they have proscribed the public use of our Liturgy, but their utmost malice cannot prevent us from using it in secret."

"Nay, you mistake, Master Lydford," said Rumbold, calmly. "The godly men who, praised be Heaven, have now the rule of this land, do not forbid men to use what devotions they will in private. It is only because you persist in prayers which, were they granted, would bring great loss and injury on the people that they suffer you not

to discuss in public the unsavoury pottage which you call your Liturgy."

"The godly men are most generous," retorted Lydford. "I thank them for their gracious permission to say mine own private prayers after mine own fashion: though I trow they could scarce prevent me, were they minded otherwise. But enough of this, friend. If you must need make one of our family party, at this, our last farewell to one another—which in my poor judgment might have been dispensed with—I pray you at least to stand as much out of earshot as may be; for there be words that I would fain speak in my children's ears, which, under your favour, are scarce suitable for yours."

With some little appearance of shame—as much, perhaps, as he was capable of feeling—Rumbold complied with this request, and removed to the further end of the apartment. Here he seated himself on a wooden stool near the door; while the Lydfords, gathering closer together, conversed in low tones with one another.

"And you are assured, then," said the old man, "that the vessel which is to convey you from England lies ready to sail, as soon as you shall have gone on board?"

"Yes, father," said Cicely. "My mother set out under Master Oakford's guidance four hours or so ago. We obeyed your commands, and induced her to believe that you and Hugh would surely rejoin her ere daybreak to-morrow. Nought else would have persuaded her to go. Alas! who shall break the truth to her, when morning shall indeed dawn?"

"Nay, my brave lass, that must be your office," said Lydford. "She comes of a good stock, though her father was somewhat given to quirks and crotchets respecting the rights of the people and the like; and you will be able to tell her that I died like a Lydford for Church and Crown, and how should a man make a better end than that? You must break it gradually to her, Cicely; for she could scarce stand the shock all at once, and it was for that reason that I forbore to take my leave of her. Nay, no weeping. Odd's-heart, think you I have never seen a Roundhead point his gun at me before, that there should be anything so terrible in the sight? Cheer up, girl; you will best do your duty towards me by comforting your mother."

"Oh, be sure, father," cried Cicely, repressing her tears with a great effort, "Cuthbert and I will do all we can to soothe her."

“Cuthbert, ay—he is a good lad and a brave. I am told he fought like any Paladin to-day. Hark you, if aught ill befall yonder lad, and the good time should ever come, when the king and his servants enjoy their own again, I will that he take on him our name and occupy the old house; unless, to be sure, you yourself——”

“Oh, father, do not speak of it,” exclaimed Cicely, with a fresh burst of weeping. “Life will never have aught joyful for me again, after you have been taken from us.”

“Tut, tut,” said Lydford. “Many a maid says that, who is married nevertheless within the year! But what now? Surely the dawn cannot yet be at hand by several hours!”

This exclamation was caused by a loud knock at the door, which sounded as if it had been made by the pommel of a sword. Rumbold cautiously withdrew the bolts, and, having first reconnoitred the new-comer, admitted a soldier wearing the uniform of Cromwell’s own corps—a mere lad in years apparently, but who announced himself as Jedediah Hawkins, a poor but faithful servant of the Lord, and of His chosen captain, the Lord General.”

“And what may be your pleasure with me,



Master Jedediah?" said Rumbold. "If it be to take my place here, even as I perceive you have just relieved the guard outside, you may return again whence you came. I have the orders of General Walters, on no account to quit this room until he shall himself arrive."

"Thou dost well to be cautious, friend," said Hawkins, "which proves thee to be worthy of thy trust. Doubtless it is because his Excellency also knows thee to be such, that he has sent thee this written order to remove thy doubts. He desires thy immediate presence, being minded, as I understand, to send thee forthwith on some confidential mission to thy master."

So saying, he handed a paper to Rumbold, who took it with very evident suspicion, and bestowed a careful examination on it before answering.

"It is the Lord General's signature, sure enough," he said at length; "and I must perforce obey, though I like it not. Doubtless you are worthy of confidence, as this note affirms. Yet I deem it well to warn you, ne'ertheless, that you maintain a careful watch over these prisoners. Should they by any chance escape, a tigress robbed of her whelps were less dangerous to encounter than Hubert Walters."

"Fear not," replied Jedediah, with a fresh accession of unction. "Albeit I am somewhat young in years, yet not in faith. My employer, Master Persistance Strong-in-the-Faith, to whom I was bound apprentice some five years ago—was he not wont to say——"

"I have no time to hear what he said," interrupted Rumbold. "The Lord General expects me, and he is not one whom it is wise to keep waiting. Listen, Master Hawkins. Yonder hangs the key of the prisoners' fetters. They are not to be removed on any account, nor are you to quit this chamber, for one single moment, until General Walters's arrival."

He hurried from the room as he concluded, and proceeded, as he had been commanded, straight to the quarters of General Cromwell. Here he found everything in a state of the utmost confusion; the time for setting out having been suddenly anticipated by several hours. He was desired to wait awhile, as his Excellency was too deeply engaged to see him at that moment; and it was fully three-quarters of an hour before he was admitted. He then received an order to take horse immediately and ride to Clidesford, where he was to warn Walters of the Lord General's unexpected depar-

ture several hours earlier than had been intended, and to bid him follow without loss of time. But a further difficulty presented itself to the execution of this order. On reaching his stables, Rumbold found that his steed, as well as that of one of his comrades, had been taken away by a soldier nearly an hour before, the latter having demanded them in the General's name. None of the horses belonging to the troop could be spared, as the whole detachment were preparing to accompany Cromwell; and, at that early hour, it was a hard matter to rouse the landlord and ostler of the neighbouring inn. He had, however, succeeded in procuring a horse, and was upon the point of mounting, when a message was brought him that General Walters had arrived at the gaol, and commanded his immediate presence.

"Arrived at the gaol!" exclaimed Rumbold. "What, so early——"

"So early, say you?" returned the messenger. "So late, I should rather be disposed to call it. But, late or early, I trust that you, Morgan Rumbold, have had nought to do with the escape of the prisoners, else I would counsel you straight-way to mount and follow them."

"Escape! The prisoners escaped!" exclaimed Rumbold. "Impossible! I left them——"

"So it appears," replied the soldier, drily. "But if you have a justification to offer, I would do so without loss of time; for General Walters is, I hear, well nigh beside himself."

On arriving at the prison, Rumbold found this assertion fully verified. Walters, whose passion was a terrible sight to witness, had already summoned the governor of the gaol and his affrighted adherents before him, and was threatening them with instant death if they did not disclose the plot, in which, as he insisted on it, they had been accomplices. The sight of Rumbold diverted his attention, but called forth a yet fiercer burst of anger. It was with the greatest difficulty that the trooper could obtain a hearing; and, even then, it is probable that nothing but the discovery of the written order, which by good fortune had been left on the floor, saved him from the immediate penalty of his supposed offence. But the perusal of this somewhat calmed the Roundhead.

"It is a clever forgery!" he exclaimed. "I could have sworn myself that this was the Lord General's writing. I cannot blame you, Rumbold, if you were deceived by it. Another time this

shall be inquired into, but we have no space for that at present. You were about to speak just now. Have you aught to disclose or counsel?"

"Yes," replied Rumbold; "I would counsel your honour to take horse, and follow the fugitives. They cannot yet have fled very far, and one of their horses, I know, is sore wearied with a long day's work. If we take fresh cattle, we can hardly fail to overtake them in a few hours. Nor shall we have any difficulty in tracking them. The bloodhound——"

"Ha! the bloodhound! I had forgotten that," cried Walters. "You are right, Rumbold; do you and four of the best men mount instantly. Let the dog also be brought and set on the track. Five golden crowns to every man if the rebels are recaptured before sunset. Twenty to the man who shall secure them."

His followers answered with a shout, and in a few minutes the party was ready to set out. The hound also was fetched, and having scented the mantle which Cicely had left behind, started without a moment's hesitation in the direction of the forest, and the Roundheads followed.

Meanwhile, the Lydfords had not been slow to

avail themselves of the opportunity of escape so unexpectedly offered them. No sooner had Rumbold quitted the room and the sound of his footsteps died off in the distance, than Hawkins, who had stationed himself near the door, stark and upright as his own musket, suddenly started from his attitude, and, taking the key from the nail on which Rumbold had hung it, began to unlock old Lydford's fetters.

"Eh? what?" exclaimed the old Cavalier, startled at this sudden diversion. "You are somewhat in a hurry, knave, methinks! it is scarce more than two hours past midnight. Heard you not what yonder fellow said before he quitted the room?"

"Speak under your breath, Nuncle," replied Hawkins. "I heard him plain enough, though he did not speak half so loud as you."

"What, Cuthbert, nephew! can this be you? and in this disguise! Odds my life, and so it is! Why, how, in the Fiend's name, did you contrive this, boy?"

"It must have been in the Fiend's name, I think," returned Cuthbert. "At least, if that old Puritan is not the Fiend himself, he must be his cousin german at the least."

"Nay," said Cicely, "if it be through Master Halkett's help that this rescue has been obtained, it were shame so to malign him. Call him rather our good and guardian angel."

"With all my heart," said Cuthbert. "All I maintain is, that he is certainly more than human. But we can talk of him anon. At present we have other matters to think on. Our friends are already waiting with the horses at the corner of Upton Lane. Off with your mantle, Cicely, and let us be gone forthwith."

They found Markham outside, attired in the same uniform as Cuthbert, and parading up and down as sentinel. Creeping cautiously down some narrow lanes, at that hour of the night wholly deserted, they soon reached the spot whither the horses had been conveyed. Mounting instantly, they made their way towards the estuary of the Severn with all the speed which the darkness would permit. On the way they had ample opportunity of discussing the strange circumstances of their escape.

"I can tell you no more," said Cuthbert, "than that we obeyed your injunctions, and again sought out this Master Halkett. To my thought he looked as if he would never quit the bed on which he lay,

until he was carried thence to the churchyard. But he had no sooner heard our tale, than he bade his attendant hand him a cordial of some kind, which stood on the table. By this he seemed marvellously strengthened ; and, rising up, desired us to put on these uniforms, which he had procured, I know not how. Meanwhile, he said he would go to the quarters of General Cromwell, and obtain from him an order which would accomplish the deliverance of the prisoners."

"Ha," cried Lydford, "did he propose to take Noll himself into the plot? That were a rare jest indeed!"

"It has been a good jest for us, any way," remarked Markham. "He returned in half an hour or so with the order, which, as you saw, cleared the prison, not only of the Roundhead who had been set to guard you, but of the sentinel outside also. The same order procured us the horses likewise. How he got it, I can no more conjecture than can Cuthbert."

"All is well that ends well," said Hugh. "Yet—not to be unthankful—I would he had been enabled to provide us with fresher cattle. The beast which my father bestrides is well-nigh exhausted already; and we have still eight or



ten miles to go. Were it not better, father," he continued, "that you should give me your horse and take mine instead? It may carry my weight to the end of our journey, but certainly not yours."

The change was made, and the fugitives recommenced their journey with all the speed they could command. In another hour, they had reached a range of high limestone rocks, through which a steep and narrow path was the only passage. Here they were compelled to proceed in single file, and at a foot pace. At the top they paused for a few moments, to take breath, before commencing the descent on the other side. Beneath them stretched a wide range of woodland country, bordering the estuary of the Severn, which lay at a distance of something less than a mile.

"Yonder rides our vessel," said Cuthbert, pointing to a schooner which lay at anchor, as near the shore as she could approach. "The *Flower of Bristol*, they call her; and she is rightly named, for not a vessel from that port can sail like her."

"Where is Hugh?" inquired Cicely, as the whole party prepared again to set forward.

"He is just behind," said Cuthbert. "He bade me say he would follow, with what speed he could; and that we had better push on, and get all in readiness for putting to sea. If he had not come up by the time all the rest of the party were on board, we were to fire a gun, as a signal to him."

"It is all that plaguey beast of his," said Lydford. "I am half sorry I exchanged with him. Yet the lad is right, too. Waiting would lose time for all, and benefit none. We had better press forward, though this sharp descent requires wary riding."

Meanwhile Hugh had found the horse on which he was now mounted fail more and more with every mile of the way, until it became impossible to keep pace with his companions. At last, just as he had surmounted the rocky path before described, the animal came to a dead stop, and neither force nor persuasion could urge it a yard further. Hugh was compelled to dismount, and was preparing to pursue the remainder of his journey on foot, when his ear suddenly caught the baying of a hound, apparently not a quarter of a mile distant. For a moment he gave himself over to despair. "My father, my father!" he

exclaimed ; " he will be taken after all." But the feeling soon passed away. He had been trained in a school which had taught him readiness of wit and firmness of nerve under all emergencies. He threw a rapid glance after his party. They were scarcely two hundred yards distant, riding leisurely down the descent, nor could their weary horses have been urged to any great exertion. If the pursuers were permitted to follow without interruption, they must inevitably overtake the fugitives. But it might be possible to delay them sufficiently long to prevent the capture ; and this he resolved, at whatever risk, to attempt. Rapidly collecting a dozen or so of large stones, which lay scattered on all sides, he piled them one above another in the narrowest part of the rocky path, so as to form a rude barricade some three feet high. He then stripped the heavy saddle from his horse's back, and laid it on the uppermost of the stones, taking up his own position behind it. He had scarcely accomplished his task, when the hound came in sight, bounding along at its slouching gallop. Walters and Rumbold followed at a distance of about fifty yards, with the rest of the soldiers still further in the rear. Hugh crouched down, levelling his musket across the hollow of his saddle, and as

soon as the dog was within range, drew the trigger. The animal uttered one deep yell, sprang high into the air, and fell dead on the pathway. Reloading without a moment's delay, the gallant lad resumed his position; while the pursuers reined in their horses in sudden surprise.

"It is young Lydford," cried Rumbold. "I knew the cut and colour of his dress. And yonder is my horse, which he has stolen. Doubtless the others are but a little in advance of us."

"Fire on him! seize him!" shouted Walters; "five crowns of gold beyond what I have already promised, to the man who takes him."

The men hesitated. Hugh's courage and coolness were well known, and he had already proved that his aim was a deadly one. Presently, however, Rumbold dismounted.

"I am scarce disposed to attempt yonder ascent," he said; "for a bullet in my brain would, in all likelihood, be my reward. But I will try to creep round the projecting point there, and reach the cover of the wood beyond. I shall then have him in the rear."

The spot which he pointed out was a crag lying about twenty yards to the right of the path, where the limestone rock sank precipitously down

to an unknown depth. Along its face, which was broken only by a few projections, grew some creeping shrubs, and at the further end a large oak-tree leaned over the abyss. Stripping off his heavy boots and gloves, Rumbold crept along under cover of the rocks till he reached the precipice, and then grasping the shrubs with a firm hand, commenced the dangerous passage. His comrades watched him with breathless anxiety as he moved along the almost level surface with the adroitness and hardihood which were his characteristic qualities. He attained the further side; he grasped the nearest branch of the oak; in another second he would have reached its shelter in safety. But his adversary was on the alert, with a resolution and steadiness of nerve which equalled his own. For one moment his person was exposed, as he emerged from the cover of the rock, and that moment decided the issue. As the sun flashed upon the steel cap and corslet, the report of Hugh's gun was heard; and Rumbold, mortally wounded, fell, without an attempt to save himself, into the abyss beneath him. His companions could hear the crashing of his body through the foliage of the trees, and the dull heavy shock which followed.

"Rush on him, before he has time to load again," exclaimed Walters, undaunted by the catastrophe. "You have him now. Ten crowns, instead of five, to the man who attempts it. Cowards!" he shouted, as he glanced round at their faces of dismay, "will you let yourselves be baffled thus by a boy? or must I myself show you the way?"

As he spoke, he plunged spurs into his horse, and urged him at full speed up the ascent, intending to overleap or dash down the barrier. Hugh dropped his empty musket, and seizing the pistol which hung at his belt, fired it full in Walters's face. The plunging of the charger distracted his aim, and the shot took effect, not on the rider, but the steed. Horse and man, however, came to the ground together, effectually blocking up the narrow passage. At the same moment the sound of a cannon-shot came booming over the waters of the Severn. It was the signal-gun at last!

With a cry of joy, Hugh flung away his weapon and dashed headlong down the pathway to the river. He had surmounted more than half the distance, before the Roundheads could clear the road of the carcase of the horse, and help their

leader, who was sorely bruised, but not disabled, by the fall, to a fresh steed. Then they followed, sparing neither whip nor spur, and regardless of the dangers of the descent. Far in advance of his men rode Walters at a furious gallop, like the wild huntsman of the German legend, forgetting wounds and fatigue alike in the fierce excitement of the pursuit. But his exertions were all in vain! Hugh reached the waterside, where Cuthbert and Markham were waiting for him with the boat. He bounded into it, and pushed from the shore. The rowers plied their oars, and had reached the vessel's side before the Puritan could attain the bank—firing his petronel after the fugitives, and idly calling upon them, in his fury, to return. He would still have continued the chase had there been any vessel at hand, in which it could have been attempted. But the schooner rode alone upon the blue waters; and he felt that, for once, his schemes were baffled. He watched the gallant little craft as she lifted her anchor and swung round to the wind.

On the deck stood Lydford, with his wife and children at his side—his grey head bare, as he raised his hat, and returned audible thanks, with the fearless reverence of those days, for his deliver-

ance. Then the sails were spread and filled by the favouring wind; and away sped the *Flower of Bristol*, light and graceful as a swan, down the waters of the Severn. Walters still retained his position, until she became a mere dot against the verge of the horizon and was finally lost to sight. Then, remounting his horse, he rode slowly and sullenly away.

THE END.





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